

# Health Sciences Libraries Journal

Official Journal of the Health  
Sciences Libraries Group of the  
Library Association of Ireland



## EDITORIAL TEAM

### **Editor-in-Chief**

Jean McMahon

### **Managing Editor**

Mary Dunne

Breeda Herlihy

### **Manuscript Editor**

Niamh Lucey

### **Operational Editor**

Julianne O'Callaghan

## ADVISORY BOARD

Niamh Adams

Delia Foley

Caitriona Lee

Patricia Patton

## JOURNAL WEBSITE

<https://journals.ucc.ie/index.php/hslj>

## JOURNAL CONTACT EMAIL

[hslj.hslg@gmail.com](mailto:hslj.hslg@gmail.com)

## SUBMISSIONS

To find out more about submitting to HSLJ visit

<https://journals.ucc.ie/index.php/hslj>

## eISSN

3088-6694

Published by University College Cork,  
Cork, Ireland on behalf of the Health  
Sciences Libraries Group, Library  
Association of Ireland.

# Health Sciences Libraries Journal

Official Journal of the Health Sciences  
Libraries Group of the Library Association  
of Ireland

# Table of Contents

## 1 EDITORIAL

*Jean McMahon*

## **PRACTICE-BASED ARTICLES**

- 3 We All Have a Story to Tell: Why Librarians Should Write About and Share What They Do  
*Martin O'Connor*

- 7 Time for SerendipiTea: A Health Library-Led Cross-Organisational Randomised Coffee Trial  
*Paul Breen and Liis Cotter*

- 12 The Anatomy of a Journal: Who, What, When, Where, Why and How  
*Mary Dunne, Breeda Herlihy and Julianne O'Callaghan*

- 20 Face Value: How Living with an Appearance Difference Informs Library Customer Service  
*Maeve Kerins*

## **REGULAR FEATURES**

- 26 Marcia Crocker Noyes: The Librarian Who Never Left  
*Meg Fairfax Fielding*

- 31 A Day in the Life of a Medical Librarian in an Academic Family Medicine Department  
*Alex Henigman*

- 34 Becoming Tusla's First Librarian  
*Ian Feerick*

- 37 A Reflection on Forty Years Working in Libraries  
*Helen Fallon*



# Table of Contents

- 41 SHOUT: Sharing Hints, Outcomes and Useful Techniques  
*Mary Dunne*

## **REPORTS & REVIEWS**

---

- 46 Sharpening Search Skills: Reflections on a Peer-Review Search Strategies Course  
*Aileen Garrihy*

## **IN MEMORIAM**

---

- 48 In Memoriam: Dr Bríd McGrath BA (Mod), MLitt, PhD, DLIS  
*Caitriona Lee*



## Editorial

**Jean McMahon**

Editor-in-Chief

Tallaght University Hospital, Dublin

Welcome to the second issue of *Health Sciences Libraries Journal* (HSLJ) and thank you to all who read the first issue and gave such wonderful feedback. We are delighted to have received so many submissions for winter 2025 and of such a varied nature.

In this issue we have contributions from two librarians from the United States. In one, we learn about a day in the life of an embedded librarian in a faculty of medicine in a university in Missouri. In the other, we find out about a pioneer of librarianship, Marcia Crocker Noyes, who was the Librarian of the oldest US medical society located in Baltimore, Maryland. Marcia was also a co-founder of the Medical Library Association, a Suffragist and, as you will read, she was so dedicated to her work that she lived on site and never left!

HSLJ came into existence through the Health Sciences Libraries Group of the Library Association of Ireland but it is not intended solely for healthcare librarians, whether readers or authors. We welcome contributions from people working in every setting who have something to say that will be of interest to the whole librarian community, which is a very broad constituency. While we very much welcome research articles, which will be peer reviewed, and practice-based learning submissions, we also want to hear about courses you have attended, books or podcasts you enjoyed, areas of special expertise, interesting librarians past and present, librarians working in non-traditional settings and ideas for new features. We would also gladly receive reflective pieces from those who have many years of experience and who are retiring and moving on to new adventures. Our first such piece is from the wonderful Helen Fallon, retired Deputy University Librarian of Maynooth University, and a published author and poet.

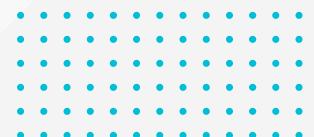
The summer 2026 issue will be published in Pride month and, in addition to our regular content, will have special features celebrating diversity in all its glorious variety. We would love to hear from LGBTQi+ colleagues about programmes or initiatives that celebrate this community, or challenges faced. We would also appeal to colleagues to share their experiences of living with neurodiversity, a strength and superpower of many who are drawn to work in libraries. In the current issue we have a very enlightening contribution from a colleague with a visible difference, who tells us about working in a library in a customer-facing role and how her difference informs her work and her connection with library users. We would welcome contributions from other colleagues for whom a visible or physical difference is part of who they are so we can share learnings, acknowledge and challenge our conscious and unconscious biases, and learn how to be more inclusive and foster a greater sense of belonging.

Librarians come from all sorts of backgrounds and many have already had careers in other areas.

Our difference is one of our main strengths. We can only grow stronger as a community and as a profession by celebrating our diversity and by fostering allyship, especially in an era when many diversity programmes and indeed many libraries, are under threat. In a 2020 article in the *Journal of the National Medical Association*, Cody Stanford highlighted the importance of diversity and inclusion in the healthcare workforce, however, the same rings true for libraries, whose staff should reflect the ‘...tapestry of our communities as it relates to race/ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, immigration status, physical disability status, and socioeconomic level to render the best possible care to our diverse patient [library user] populations’. We look forward to receiving your submissions for summer 2026.

## REFERENCES

Cody Stanford, F. (2020) ‘The Importance of Diversity and Inclusion in the Healthcare Workforce’. *Journal of the National Medical Association*, 112(3), pp.247-249.



## Practice-Based Article

# **We All Have a Story to Tell: Why Librarians Should Write About and Share What They Do**

**Martin O'Connor**

University College Cork Library

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5278-3399>

### **ABSTRACT**

This article encourages librarians across all sectors to embrace writing as a means of professional development, community engagement, and career progression. Drawing from a webinar delivered to Irish library professionals, the author illustrates how informal formats like blog posts can serve as foundations for more formal journal articles. The piece outlines practical strategies for initiating writing, transitioning from blog to journal, and overcoming common barriers such as self-doubt and time constraints. Through sector-specific examples and actionable advice, the article demystifies the writing process and advocates for librarians to share their unique experiences and insights. Ultimately, it positions writing not as an academic burden but as a vital tool for reflection, collaboration, and contribution to the profession.

### **KEYWORDS**

writing for publication, writing, blogging

### **BACKGROUND**

In May 2025, I was invited to give a webinar on blogging / writing for librarians as part of a joint event organised by the Library Association of Ireland Career Development Group (CDG) and the Academic and Special Libraries (A&SL) Group. Following that session, I was asked to write this article for the Health Sciences Libraries Journal. I mention this because it demonstrates something important: how a presentation or blog post can be converted into a piece of writing for a journal. That act of translation—from talk to blog, talk to article or blog to article—is a powerful reminder that writing does not have to start from scratch. Often, we already have the raw material; the task is to shape it for a new audience and platform.

The goal of this article is simple: to encourage librarians, in all areas of our profession, to write and share ideas. Writing may feel daunting, but it is an achievable, valuable practice that strengthens our profession and our individual voices. In what follows, I will share ways to approach writing, examples from different sectors of librarianship, and practical strategies to get words onto the page.

### **WHY WRITE?**

Librarianship is a profession grounded in communication, knowledge-sharing, and community. Yet, many librarians hesitate to write—whether for a blog, a newsletter, or a peer-reviewed journal. Common reasons include lack of time, self-doubt, or uncertainty about what to write about. But writing has many benefits:



- Professional development: Writing clarifies your own thinking and demonstrates reflective practice.
- Visibility: Sharing your work, whether through a short blog post or a peer-reviewed article, helps others see what librarians contribute.
- Community building: Your ideas may spark conversations, collaborations, or improvements in another library.
- Career progression: Publications, especially in journals, can strengthen a CV, support promotion, or open doors to conference speaking.
- Most importantly, the profession of librarianship benefits when practitioners share practical experiences, innovative projects, and critical reflections. No two libraries are the same; what you're doing in yours may be exactly what someone else is looking for inspiration on.

### STARTING SMALL: WRITING FOR BLOGS

In my talk, I encouraged participants to start with blogging. Blogs are a low-barrier, informal way to share ideas. They can be as short as 400–600 words and the tone can be conversational. Importantly, blogs are forgiving—unlike journal articles, they do not require exhaustive literature reviews or polished academic prose.

#### What to Blog About?

- Everyday practice: A new shelving system, a trial run of a digital tool, or your library's approach to orientation.
- Reflections: Lessons learned from a project that went well—or one that didn't.
- Resources: A "top five" list of useful guides, apps, or databases.
- Events: A conference or training session you attended, with your reflections.

Examples from across Librarianship:

- A school librarian blogging about how they use graphic novels to encourage reluctant readers.
- A public librarian sharing the behind-the-scenes process of running a community history project.
- An academic librarian writing a short guide to the reference management workshops they trialled with undergraduates.
- A health sciences librarian explaining how they introduced systematic review support services and what challenges emerged.

These pieces do not need to be perfect; their value lies in their immediacy and accessibility. Of course, I wouldn't be doing my duty if I didn't point out that [Libfocus](#)—which I co-edit—is always open to contributions from librarians who'd like to publish a post but don't have their own blog.

#### Moving from Blog to Journal

- The transition from a blog to a journal article often intimidates librarians. But in truth, it is often a matter of expansion and formalisation. A blog post can be the seed of an article. Here's how:
- Expand the context: A blog post might simply describe what you did. For a journal, place your work in a wider context. Why does it matter? How does it compare with other examples?
- Bring in evidence: Journal articles benefit from citing relevant literature or statistics. This doesn't mean you need a PhD-level review; two or three references can frame your work.
- Structure it: Blogs can be casual and narrative. Articles usually benefit from clear headings such as introduction, methods, discussion, and conclusion—or, for a reflective piece, background, case example, lessons learned, and implications.

- Polish the style: Journal writing tends to be more formal, but friendly and accessible writing is still valued. Avoid unnecessary jargon.
- Length: Blogs might be 600–800 words. Articles are often 1,500–3,000 words. If you already have a blog post, expanding it with context, literature, and detail can get you there.

### Examples of the Transition

To make this concrete, here are some examples of how different types of librarians could convert a blog into a journal article:

- A school librarian blogs about a new reading programme. For a journal, they could expand this into an article comparing their initiative with literacy research, including student feedback, and offering a framework for others to adapt.
- A public librarian writes a blog about running a makerspace event. Expanded for a journal, this could explore how makerspaces align with digital inclusion policies, include participant survey data, and discuss implications for community engagement.
- An academic librarian writes a blog reflection on teaching information literacy during COVID-19. Expanded, this could become a case study article linking their experience to literature on online pedagogy and student engagement.
- A health sciences librarian blogs about supporting systematic reviews. Turned into an article, this could examine demand for systematic reviews, outline workflows developed, compare practices with published guidelines, and propose a model for other libraries.

In all these cases, the blog is the spark. The journal article adds depth, context, and analysis.

### PRACTICAL STRATEGIES FOR GETTING STARTED

Even with good intentions, sitting down to write can be difficult. Here are some practical tips I share with colleagues:

- Capture ideas immediately: Keep a notebook or digital file where you jot down potential topics. Often, the best writing starts with “That might make a good post.”
- Start with an outline: Break the piece into sections (Introduction, Context, What We Did, What We Learned). Filling in sections one by one is less intimidating than facing a blank page.
- Write first, edit later: Don’t worry about perfect sentences on the first draft. Get the ideas down; polish them afterwards.
- Use your existing work: Presentations, training notes, or project reports can all be reshaped into publishable writing.
- Buddy up: Share drafts with a colleague. Writing in pairs or groups can ease the burden and enrich the perspective.
- Set small goals: Commit to writing 300 words in a sitting. Momentum builds from small steps.

Don’t be afraid to submit: Journals expect revisions. Peer review is not a judgment of your worth, but a collaboration to improve the work.

### OVERCOMING BARRIERS

From speaking to people, I see that common barriers come up again and again.

“I don’t have anything new to say.”

You do. Your context, your users, and your approach are unique. Even if someone has written about, say, orientation programmes before, they have not written about your orientation programme, in your library, with your reflections.

“I’m not a good enough writer.”

Writing improves with practice. Start small with a blog post. With each piece, your confidence and clarity

will grow. Journals are not expecting literary genius; they are looking for relevance, clarity, and value to readers.

“I don’t have time.”

Time is a real challenge, but writing doesn’t have to mean setting aside whole days. Break it down: 20–30 minutes of focused writing, once or twice a week, builds momentum. Repurpose material you already have—training notes, presentations, or reports. Think of writing as part of professional reflection, not an extra burden.

“I wouldn’t know where to publish.”

The publishing landscape can seem confusing, but there are plenty of entry points. Blogs (personal or institutional), library newsletters, and professional association bulletins are great starting places. From there, consider sector-specific journals such as this one or practitioner journals like *An Leabharlann*. If you’re uncertain, reach out to editors—they are often happy to advise.

“I’m worried about criticism.”

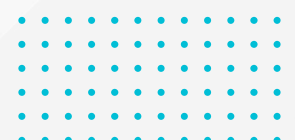
Sharing your work publicly can feel daunting. But remember, peer review is intended to improve your piece, not to tear it down. Feedback from editors or colleagues strengthens your writing. Start with smaller, lower-stakes platforms (like blogs or newsletters) to build confidence. Over time, you’ll see that constructive feedback is part of the writing journey.

## A FINAL REFLECTION

As I mentioned at the start, this very article began as a webinar on blogging. The transition from spoken presentation to written article demonstrates the same process I am encouraging you to try: repurpose what you already have, expand it, and adapt it for a new audience.

Writing is not an abstract academic exercise; it is simply another way of sharing what we do and what we know. Whether you work in a health sciences library, a school library, a public library, or an academic library, your experiences matter. By writing them down, you contribute to the ongoing conversation that strengthens and grows our profession.

So, my encouragement is this: start small. Write that blog post. Share that reflection via your own blog or as a guest post on Libfocus. And when you are ready, take the next step and turn it into a journal article. Your voice is valuable, and the profession benefits from hearing it. Do try it, I’m very sure you will enjoy it. Good Luck.





Practice-Based Article


## Time for SerendipiTEA: A Health Library-Led Cross-Organisational Randomised Coffee Trial

Paul Breen and Liis Cotter

Paul Breen, Librarian, Mercy University Hospital, Cork

 <https://orcid.org/0009-0001-3292-6305>

Liis Cotter, Librarian, Adult Mental Health Service, Health Service Executive, Cork

 <https://orcid.org/0009-0007-6323-8875>

### ABSTRACT

*Time for SerendipiTEA* was introduced by librarians at Mercy University Hospital (MUH) and Adult Mental Health Services Cork (AMHS/St. Michael's Unit) as a pilot initiative to encourage staff to connect across those services.

Based on the idea of randomised coffee trials (RCTs), the project allowed staff from MUH and St. Michael's Unit to volunteer to be paired with a colleague who they would not normally meet in their day to day lives at work. Pairs were invited to arrange an informal meeting, either in person or virtually, with no set agenda beyond starting a conversation about each other's work and experiences.

Fourteen staff members took part — seven from MUH and seven from St. Michael's Unit — representing a range of departments and roles in medicine, nursing, allied health and administration. Feedback showed that participants valued the chance to meet new colleagues, broaden their understanding of the health service and reflect on their work. One participant described the experience as “energising” and shared that it gave them “a greater appreciation of not only other services but [their] own also”.

Challenges were mainly practical, such as scheduling difficulties for the participants and a low feedback response rate for the organisers. Participants suggested ideas for future iterations, including broader promotion and alternative formats such as group or “speed meeting” sessions.

Overall, the trial provided a positive foundation for future iterations of Time for SerendipiTEA and demonstrated clear potential for building stronger connections between MUH and AMHS staff, using projects like this RCT.

### KEYWORDS

randomised coffee trial, rct, library-led initiatives, health librarianship, health library services, knowledge sharing, staff engagement, cross-organisational communication, informal learning, serendipitous conversations

## PROBLEM STATEMENT

Staff in MUH and St. Michael's Unit work in separate teams, with little natural overlap in their day-to-day roles. Although both services share the same campus, they are largely distinct, with a liaison service serving the sole point of connection.

This separation can limit collaboration, mutual understanding and the sharing of ideas. The aim of this project was to create a simple way for staff to build relationships and remove the limitations across MUH and AMHS' organisational boundaries.

By rolling out an RCT like *Time for SerendipiTEA*, MUH and AMHS librarians hoped to encourage conversations that might not otherwise happen, supporting both professional collaboration and a stronger sense of community amongst healthcare professionals in Cork.

## BACKGROUND

*Time for SerendipiTEA* was inspired, in part, by H       Russell's mini eBook *Serendipitous Conversation*. Russell suggests that 'conversations are the way workers discover what they know, share it with their colleagues, and in the process create new knowledge for the organisation' (Russell, 2015).

In knowledge intensive work environments like MUH and St. Michael's Unit, informal conversations can be as valuable as formal ones. For Russell, they are key for enabling the transfer of tacit knowledge insights and expertise that are difficult to document. Such conversations also help to break down silos and provide networking opportunities across organisational boundaries, creating links that might not exist in day-to-day work (Russell, 2015).

RCTs are one structured approach to encouraging these serendipitous conversations. RCTs pair colleagues at random and invite them to meet for a short, informal chat over tea or coffee. The approach originated at Nesta[1], where it was designed to institutionalise serendipitous conversation and create opportunities for cross-team learning without imposing a formal agenda (Russell, 2015). RCT participants are free to discuss work, share experiences, or simply get to know one another, and there is no requirement to report on the content of the conversation. The simplicity of the model is part of its strength: informal, voluntary meetings give participants time for reflection and knowledge exchange.

*Time for SerendipiTEA* was also inspired by the adoption of RCTs in healthcare settings abroad, particularly in the UK's National Health Service (NHS). Reported outcomes there also include the breaking down of professional silos, widening of professional networks, encouragement of knowledge-sharing, improvement of morale and support of collaboration across departments (Treadway, 2018).

RCT participants often speak to the potential benefit of meeting colleagues they would not otherwise encounter, gaining fresh perspectives on other teams' work and fostering relationships that can support future collaboration. Nesta, which made RCTs a core part of their organisation many years ago, has staff who reported that RCTs give them an "excuse" to meet, catch up, and build connections with people across the organisation, revealing unexpected synergies between their work and creating a greater comfort for

[1] Nesta is a UK based innovation agency that works for social good. It was set up in 1998 with funding from the UK National Lottery and became an independent charity in 2012. Today, Nesta carries out research, tests new ideas in practice, and works with policymakers to help solve important social challenges.

approaching others regarding potential collaborations (Soto, 2013).

In the context of MUH and St. Michael's Unit specifically, staff from those respective services rarely interact, despite working on the same campus and towards shared patient care goals. This separation limits opportunities for collaboration and mutual understanding. This was a key motivation for piloting an RCT like *Time for SerendipITEA*.

By creating random pairings for informal meetings, the project aimed to encourage conversations that might not otherwise occur between staff at MUH and St. Michael's Unit, thereby supporting knowledge exchange, and strengthening connections across those two services.

## METHODS

The project was jointly led by librarians at MUH and AMHS Cork. Before planning began, advice was sought from healthcare librarians in Ireland and the UK who had previously run similar initiatives. Colleagues from Mid Cheshire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust and Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust generously shared their experiences of implementation and evaluation, which helped to shape this project's approach.

Planning then moved to the design of a promotional poster, which was displayed on notice boards in all areas of MUH and St. Michael's Unit. It was also circulated via staff email lists. The poster included all relevant details and a QR code linking directly to an online registration form. Reminder emails were sent during the sign-up period, emphasising that participation would be informal and flexible.

After the registration period, volunteers were paired using a random generator. As there was an even split between volunteers from MUH and AMHS, it was possible to pair each MUH participant with a colleague from AMHS, and vice versa. This was valuable, as it allowed the project to maximise opportunities for cross-service exchange. Pairs were introduced to each other via email and invited to arrange a meeting at a time and place that suited them. Meetings could take place in person or virtually, depending on preference. No agenda was set, leaving space for participants to steer the conversation in whatever direction they wished. However, suggested discussion topics were circulated as optional starting points.

The project timeline ran over several weeks starting in March 2025. Sign-up was open for two weeks, and meetings were expected to take place during the following month. At the end of this period, an anonymous feedback survey was distributed to all participants. The survey aimed to capture information on participants' experiences and gauge the extent to which this project facilitated the cross-organisational benefits discussed above.

Questions explored practical aspects – such as the ease of arranging the meeting, any barriers encountered, the content and outcomes of discussions, perceived overall effects, key take-aways, suggestions for improvements as well as space for additional statements.

Participants were also asked to indicate how they heard about the project, with a view to evaluating which promotional methods had been most successful.



## RESULTS AND EVALUATION

A total of fourteen staff members took part: seven from MUH and seven from St. Michael's Unit. They represented a mix of departments and staff levels in medicine, nursing, allied health and administration.

Survey feedback on the in-person meet-ups was very positive. Participants valued the chance to connect with colleagues from different areas and learn about their work. One participant said, "I really enjoyed it. It pushed me outside my comfort zone. I was very energised after it, it gave me a greater appreciation of not only other services but my own also." Another said that it was "good to meet staff in the health service who work in different areas to myself to broaden my understanding of the inner workings of MUH".

The sessions provided opportunities to discuss both professional and personal experiences, from ongoing projects to unique challenges. Many participants highlighted that the meetings gave them insights into how other services operate. As one noted, the RCT helped them gain "an awareness of [their colleague's] area of work" and understand how it could be valuable to the service users they support. Another noted, "I found it interesting to learn about [their colleague's] role, particularly as it is so different to mine. It gave me insight into an area of the health service that I have not worked with directly."

*Time for SerendipITEA* as a networking opportunity was listed as a key benefit. Participants appreciated meeting new people and building connections across the organisation, with one feedback respondent listing the opportunity for "meeting new people" as the key benefit they took away from the experience. Overall, participants described the *Time for SerendipITEA* as energising and informative. Many expressed an interest in attending future sessions, "I would love to try it again. With same services or another". Participants valued the informal nature of the conversations, which made it easy to connect without pressure. Some also said they planned to encourage colleagues to sign up for future iterations.

Challenges were mostly practical. A few participants mentioned scheduling difficulties, while others suggested small improvements such as sharing phone numbers or promoting the initiative more widely. One participant proposed a group format or "speed meeting" style event as an alternative for future rounds.

The main limitation of the evaluation was the survey response rate, which was lower than hoped at 36%. This meant not all experiences were captured. For future rounds, additional reminders and clearer communication about the importance of feedback will be needed.

Despite these challenges, the first run of *Time for SerendipITEA* showed that there is real interest in and value from initiatives like it. This initiative also had a positive impact on the MUH and AMHS libraries. By leading this project, the services gained greater visibility and reminded staff of the support available. In healthcare settings, factors such as staff turnover due to rotations, limited reliance on email, and the fact that library premises are often away from main thoroughfares can mean that many staff are not fully aware of the services offered by their library. This project helped to draw attention to the MUH and AMHS libraries and broadened staff understanding of the library's role in a healthcare setting, extending beyond book loans and study spaces. The experience provided a foundation to build on, with clear lessons for how to improve it in future.

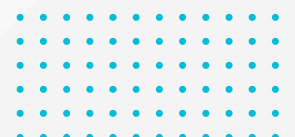
## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks are due to all staff who took part in this project and especially those who provided feedback. Gratitude is also extended to the organisers of the Mercy Clinical Audit and Quality Improvement Day for featuring a poster on the project and to colleagues at University College Cork, for supporting its inclusion in CORA.

Special thanks go to Cadence Ware, Library & Knowledge Specialist at the Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust, and Susan Smith, Knowledge & Library Service Manager at the JET Library, Mid Cheshire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, for generously sharing their previous work and experience with RCTs.

## REFERENCES

- Russell, H. (2015). *Serendipitous conversations* [Mini ebook]. TheKnowledgeBusiness.  
<https://theknowledgebusiness.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Serendipitous-Conversations.pdf>
- Treadway, V. (2018). *Making connections and widening professional networks at Wirral with a Randomised Coffee Trial*. Fab NHS Stuff. <https://fabnhsstuff.net/fab-stuff/making-connections-widening-professional-networks-wirral-randomised-coffee-trial>
- Soto, M. (2013, January 21). *Institutionalising serendipity via productive coffee breaks*. Nesta.  
<https://www.nesta.org.uk/blog/institutionalising-serendipity-via-productive-coffee-breaks/>




## Practice-Based Article

# **The Anatomy of a Journal: Who, What, When, Where, Why and How**

**Mary Dunne, Breeda Herlihy and Julianne O'Callaghan**

Mary Dunne, Health Research Board, Dublin  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0147-8594>

Breeda Herlihy, University College Cork  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5318-5876>

Julianne O'Callaghan, South Infirmar-y-Victoria University Hospital, Cork  
 <https://orcid.org/0009-0001-1826-3381>

## **ABSTRACT**

Those working in the library and information sector are familiar with journals as readers, authors, reviewers, trainers and collection managers. In 2025, the Health Sciences Libraries Group committee of the Library Association of Ireland took the next step and became a publisher. The basic process will be familiar to anyone who has developed a new service as it involved translating ideas into practical goals, policies, workflows and other necessary tasks to create a useful, reputable product. In this article we reveal why we embarked on this project, how we dealt with challenges, and what knowledge, skills and resources were needed to fulfil our aim of creating a free forum to share our collective professional knowledge. We hope that the lessons learned along the way will be of interest to those producing similar products or services.

## **KEYWORDS**

journal publishing, journal creation, project management, knowledge sharing

## **INTRODUCTION**

The Health Sciences Libraries Group (HSLG) of the Library Association of Ireland is founded on the beliefs that the application of evidence from continuing professional development (CPD) underpins excellence in practice; and that our work and profession are significantly strengthened when we capture this knowledge and share it freely with one another.

Learning through experience and additional development activity is a continual process. Every day members of our profession discover new tools, techniques and ways of improving services. The HSLG committee therefore has focused on providing opportunities for CPD through our annual conference, webinars, networking events, virtual journal club, literature-search buddy scheme and mentoring programme.

Writing promotes reflection and refinement of ideas and experiences. Sharing this enables us to support others, particularly isolated or solo librarians, and to capture our collective knowledge. Starting in 2003, the committee produced an electronic newsletter called HINT (Health Information News & Thinking). In recent years, we recognised that the quality of contributions to HINT warranted a wider readership than a newsletter could provide, and the idea of the Health Sciences Libraries Journal (HSLJ) was born.

In this article, we have presented the process as a series of steps; however, this does not suggest that we



simply followed from one to the next. Many of the actions described here overlapped and were revisited repeatedly as we learned and refined our thoughts. The process was iterative and interwoven throughout.

## JOURNAL PRODUCTION

### Step 1: Define Our Aims and Objectives

The first step was to set out what we wanted to achieve. Our purpose was to create a journal that will enhance the health library community's ability to make evidence-informed decisions; enable learning, creativity, reflective practice and change; and promote our value and professional abilities to stakeholders. We also had several objectives, which formed the foundation of our journal criteria and policies (Table 1.).

**Table 1. HSLJ Objectives and Related Rationale**

| Objective   | Rationale   |
|---|---|
| 1. To produce a journal that is freely open to everyone.  | We believe that if knowledge is worth sharing then access should not be restricted. We should not limit reading access or authorship to those who can afford to pay.  |
| 2. To include articles on a broad range of topics from across the library and information sector. | Although we are a health-oriented group, we work in a variety of settings and have significant commonalities with those across our profession. We have a lot to learn from one other.   |
| 3. To be a welcoming forum for all.   | Writing for publication can be daunting. We want to encourage everyone, including novice or isolated writers, to share their work and ideas with us by accepting professional, yet less academic, articles such as case studies, interesting roles and event reviews. |
| 4. To gain a reputation as a trusted publication of quality and prestige.                         | To encourage the highest standards in librarianship we need to engage in and learn from research and evaluation. The journal should be a source of learning and excellence through high editorial standards, quality control and peer review of these article types.  |

**Key learning for step 1:** understanding why you are undertaking a project is essential as this should underpin all future decisions.

### Step 2: Situation Analysis

It's important to have ambitious goals, but they must be realistic. A scoping exercise was necessary in order to understand our context and the resources that were available and required.

**(a) Stakeholder needs** – While defining our purpose, we needed to consider what each of our key stakeholder groups would find useful:

- Authors – free to publish; variety of options (formal peer-review but also informal articles); reputable source; editorial assistance.
- Readers – free to read, easy to access; coherent, relevant articles of use in practice and of professional

interest; trusted content.

- Peer reviewers – clear guidance (expectations and timelines); possible recognition.
- Advisory board – comprehensive standards and quality control in all aspects of journal production; ability to provide input; recognition for work.
- Editorial team – ability to meet our objectives and our deadlines; clear editorial guidance, processes and workflows.

**(b) External assessment** – Policies, guidelines, layouts and submission criteria vary for each journal. We looked at the websites of large publishers to ensure we captured the important organisational and instructional elements. However, we largely focused on those, like the excellent [JEAHIL](#) and [JOHILA](#), who are very similar to us in terms of topic, scope and platinum open access status. Here there was greater consistency. For example, many publishers of professional journals, like ours, include the choice to submit either research articles for peer review or more informal articles such as case-studies or event reviews, which was the option we selected. Rather than compete with existing journals, we hope to encourage new authors among our members and wider community, while providing an additional open access space for experienced authors to publish.

**(c) Internal assessment** – The HSLG committee has always been fortunate to have extremely dedicated and active members. We chose a core editorial team of five. Because working on the journal is only part of the remit for each person, it was decided that two issues per year would be sufficient. In terms of cost, we did not identify additional financial outlays in producing our electronic journal. We already had a subscription to the design platform Canva and would use an open-source publishing platform. We discussed the benefits and drawbacks of sponsorship for the journal but decided not to seek this unless required.

**(d) Risks and challenges** – We identified several potential issues to setting up our journal.

Potential challenges included:

- attracting sufficient content of interest and value to readership
- having the time and ability to manage submissions efficiently and effectively
- creating policies and guidelines that are comprehensive yet clear and succinct
- dealing with technology such as artificial intelligence that can create plausible yet flawed material.

Potential risks included:

- suffering reputational damage due to ethical issues (e.g. from publishing misinformation, plagiarism, copyright infringement)
- encountering unforeseen financial costs
- having insufficient volunteers to manage the journal in the long term
- losing access to our chosen journal platform.

Most of these issues can be addressed and mitigated somewhat in policies, for others we need to monitor and identify alternative plans.

**Key learning from step 2:** It is essential to have conversations at the beginning about roles and risks. It's possibly too easy to focus only on immediate tasks, but assigning responsibilities, forecasting and creating contingency plans for potential issues is important.

### **Step 3. Clarify and Assign Roles, Responsibilities and Schedules**

Managing a journal requires a team with varied interests and skill sets.

- An Editor in Chief needs excellent interpersonal skills as they commission articles, select reviewers, liaise with board members, edit articles and write editorials.

- The Managing Editors have a key role in journal creation and management. We identified two main aspects, governance and technical oversight, so have two people in this position. One researched and wrote policies, procedures and guidelines and the other managed all aspects of the platform, liaising with our excellent host in University College Cork (UCC) Library. Managing editors are also responsible for ensuring that the scope of submissions meet our editorial criteria and are appropriate for our audience. They coordinate submission workflows and peer review process, manage article identifiers, edit submissions and communicate with authors.
- An electronic journal requires someone to develop the look and structure of the journal. The Operational Editor is responsible for designing templates, creating and uploading final proofs and online content.
- The Manuscript Editor needs a very keen eye for detail as they are involved in copyediting and final proofing of submissions. They ensure a consistent approach to editing style throughout.

We knew it would also be necessary to have the additional support, expertise and diverse experience of an advisory board and reviewers. We were exceptionally fortunate that volunteers from our community answered this call.

**Key learning from step 3:** Don't underestimate the amount of work involved in setting up this type of project. Recruit a team with diverse skills and set clear roles and responsibilities.

#### **Step 4. Identify a Reliable and Accessible Platform**

The availability of an existing journal publishing platform, Open Journal System (OJS) hosted by UCC Library made this part of the process easier. The OJS software developed by the Public Knowledge Project has really enhanced the infrastructure for facilitating global open access to scholarly communications. Over 52,000 journals use OJS (RPubs, 2024), which makes it "the most widely used scholarly publishing software in the world" (PKP, n.d.). With this kind of reach, it means that there are lots of resources which we were able to call on when troubleshooting minor issues, from online training, wikis and videos to community Q&A forums.

As we met the terms and conditions of hosting by UCC Library, by having an open access agenda and a member of UCC staff involved, we were able to get familiar with the system through a test journal set up for us by the Digital Library Developer at UCC Library. UCC Journals has been in operation for a number of years, so we had the benefit of experience built up through bringing numerous journals onto their platform. We also received advice on registering ISSNs, DOIs and copyright.

**Key learning from step 4:** Using existing open-source software with a wide user base makes it easier to get a journal up and running.

#### **Step 5. Understand the Management of System Processes and Technicalities**

Three of us separately undertook online training on using OJS and came together to discuss it over a period of months. We also met up in person to test out the workflow which follows the stages that authors and editors move through when article data and files are uploaded, an editor is assigned and the review and copyediting process is followed. We had to align and assign the role titles from the OJS to match our chosen editorial titles. This was important, as each editor type in the OJS has different access and notification settings. OJS has a publication workflow built into it with options for configuring different aspects of the

process. These can be a bit confusing when you're not fully familiar with publishing terminology and journal production process or not working full time on the system. Using the test system and trying out test articles has been helpful for understanding and applying the workflow but undoubtedly having expertise and support of the Digital Library Developer on hand really eased any teething problems.

**Key learning from step 5:** Applying practical examples to the test system was really helpful for getting to grips with the workflows.

### Step 6. Develop Journal Policies and Guidelines

Every service requires excellent governance, and journals need policies and guidelines that suit their goals, stakeholders and funds. For the HSLJ to be a trusted source we need clear and comprehensive policies and guidelines. Policies set out our decisions and everyone's responsibilities in relation to editing and peer review, rights and open access, privacy and consent, and quality and integrity. Guidelines outline the procedures for authors, editors and peer reviewers. They contain practical information to enable consistent decisions and style.

- **Editing guidelines:** These are instructions for editors to promote the consistent application formatting and style. Decisions of this nature are generally a matter of preference, so we needed to choose basic elements such as font and heading type, size and spacing, reference style and the overall structure of articles. We decided to use the APA style guidelines as our core source (American Psychological Association, 2024). We then discussed which elements we would adopt and include in our own guidelines.
- **Author guidelines:** It is better that authors apply style guidelines before submission, so that edited copies aren't too cluttered with minor style changes. Directions in relation to issues that could delay publication, such as copyright notices, are also required. We therefore added quite a few formatting and other directives, which we hope will make the editing process quicker and simpler for everyone. Our author guidelines were added to the [submissions webpage](#).
- **Peer reviewer guidelines:** Offering peer review for research articles requires significant time and energy for all involved. Undertaking and sharing research is incredibly important for our profession. We want to make the process as simple as possible, while having the systems and checks in place that will help build our reputation as a trusted source of reliable information. For research articles, there has to be a strong emphasis on quality. Readers must be able to trust that the items we publish in this section have gone through a quality control process so they can believe and apply study findings. Peer reviewers freely provide their time and expertise, often without public acknowledgement. We developed guidelines with instructions, examples and links to useful courses and resources; and a form with checklist which we hope will aid the process.

A common element in all policy and guideline creation was striking a balance between the needs of various stakeholders. For example, although editors may like to receive perfectly crafted, best-practice research articles, as long as authors are transparent in all aspects of their work, including discussing errors and omissions, there is generally something for readers to learn. This approach shifts the review focus from perfection to transparency.

**Key learning from step 6:** Governance involves anticipation, examining the big picture and refining elements into clear management structures and guidance. Looking at criteria boundaries so they are

strong enough to protect but flexible enough to be inclusive is important.

### **Step 7. Finding, Managing and Editing Content**

Having sufficient relevant content for future issues may be one of our greatest challenges. So much great work is being done in our profession but writing about it for a journal article may not be a priority due to time and other constraints. We hope that our journal provides a welcoming space that encourages sharing of both formal and informal experiences.

For our first issue we decided to have invited content only, which gave us time to finish setting up the website and workflows. Fortunately, in March 2025 we had held a successful conference and many of the presenters agreed to write an article, which formed the core of our content.

We found that managing editing workflows needed:

- clear division of roles among the editorial team
- deadlines for each part of the work (including consideration for potential delays)
- regular communication
- detailed editorial guidelines
- a supportive environment that enabled us to discuss topics and ask questions freely.

It can be difficult for editors to know how much editing is enough. It's essential that authors are allowed to keep their voice, so editing is primarily about ensuring that articles meet our criteria, are complete and consistent in style. However, an objective, external reader can sometimes see potential changes that might improve clarity and flow of writing, so editors are well placed to make suggestions. We hope that authors find the process to be respectful and constructive.

**Key learning from step 7:** Content is key. Establishing broad acceptance criteria, a clear workflow and editing guidelines at an early stage is essential.

### **Step 8. Website and Template Design Look and Content Assembly**

In 2024 the HSLG committee decided on a brand redesign consisting of a new HSLG logo and colour scheme, and a graphic designer was commissioned to do the work. This refresh coincided with development of the first issue of the journal. The new logo, consisting of a simple colour scheme of teal, black and white, looked well online and was adopted into the design of the journal.

Prior to designing the journal layout on Canva, templates in Word and PDF format were looked at. Canva was chosen as the eventual design tool as it lent the journal a professional look that reflected how the editorial committee wanted their profession represented. A number of draft layouts were presented before the journal design came together. A layout with an image at the bottom half of the page that changes with each issue was chosen to give the title page a sharp, distinctive appearance. Several free image sources were searched, and the image of a DNA helix spiral was chosen to complement the new DNA double helix-designed HSLG logo. Although alternative page backgrounds for the various articles were taken into consideration, it was ultimately decided to maintain a uniform background throughout the journal.

The journal's editorial guide was regularly consulted to determine the journal's style. Before a final decision was made, the editorial committee repeatedly reviewed a variety of topics, including the font size and type used on each page, the style and placement of page numbers, running titles, the journal's URL and the format of tables and figures.

**Key learning from step 8:** The style of a journal should be clear, precise and inclusive to ensure content is



legible to all readers and can be read on all devices.

### Step 9. Launch and Communication Plan

The first issue went live on 30 June 2025. A plan was put in place to notify groups of people in stages. This soft launch initially only advised the authors, the HSLG committee and the Advisory Board that the journal had been published. This approach meant there was an opportunity for fresh eyes to review the layout and design and allow for any tweaks or adjustments to be made before the full launch. A few days after going live, an email announcing the publication's first issue was sent to all HSLG members. This was closely followed by announcements to wider mailing lists and notifications put up on the LAI and HSLG websites. Social media posts were rolled out next on the HSLG's Bluesky, LinkedIn and X accounts. Promotion of individual articles and their authors was posted every two to three days after the initial journal post to keep the momentum going.

The HSLJ's objective is to provide a forum for those working in the library and information sector to share and showcase knowledge and experience. To secure its future, a marketing strategy must be mapped out and put into action. This strategy will include plans on how to:

- motivate people to read the journal
- recruit authors from within the library and information sector
- recruit authors from outside the sector who may be interested in contributing.

This could include social media posts, blogs on the HSLG website and other library and information sites.

**Key learning from step 9:** A soft launch allows adjustments to be made in a controlled environment before launching a publication to a wider audience.

### CONCLUSION

Setting up the HSLJ proved to be an intense period for the editorial team as we identified the why, where, who, what and how aspects of production, often adapting strategy as we began implementation. We had to apply a variety of knowledge and skills in areas including project management, technology, design, writing and editing. Above all, good communication was key, and we had many discussions along the way. In line with our ethos for a collaborative approach to CPD, where we reflect on our work and share what we have learned, we hope this article is of interest to readers.

We found that our core focus needed to be on what we wanted to achieve. Our purpose was not so much about creating a journal but about creating an accessible space that would encourage the free exchange of ideas and expertise. This emphasis meant that the needs of our stakeholders (authors, reviewers and readers) had to be our primary guide when making decisions.

Although there is considerable overlap in stakeholder goals, there can be tension between the needs of different groups. For example, editors need policies and guidelines to be comprehensive and protective, but authors need clarity and simplicity. Balancing these needs in decision-making proved difficult and time-consuming at times. We are likely to adjust our directives as we progress and receive feedback.

We are immensely grateful to all contributors including authors, advisory board members, the HSLG committee, our platform host at UCC Library, and members of our profession who have read and promoted the journal, supporting us in a myriad of ways. We hope that you will continue to actively engage with the HSLJ. Together we can support one other and build our reputation as a strong, evidence-driven profession.

**REFERENCES**

American Psychological Association. (2024). *Style and Grammar Guidelines*. Retrieved 16 October 2025, from <https://apastyle.apa.org/style-grammar-guidelines>

PKP. (n.d.). *Open Journal Systems (OJS)*. Retrieved 16 October 2025, from <https://pkp.sfu.ca/software/ojs/>

RPubs. (2024). *OJS Growth Statistics*. Retrieved 16 October 2025, from <https://rpubs.com/saurabh90/ojs-stats-2023>



## Practice-Based Article

# Face Value: How Living with an Appearance Difference Informs Library Customer Service

Maeve Kerins

Technological University Dublin

 <https://orcid.org/0009-0001-8428-8579>

### ABSTRACT

This reflective article explores how living with a visible difference shapes professional practice in a public-facing academic library role. Drawing on personal experience with craniofrontonasal dysplasia (CFND), the author examines how visibility, empathy, and self-awareness inform interactions with library users, colleagues, and the wider university community. The article highlights the importance of representation, inclusive service delivery, and human-centred approaches in library practice, linking personal insight with institutional frameworks for equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI). By integrating lived experience with professional practice, the author demonstrates how understanding and valuing difference can enhance user experience, foster belonging, and cultivate meaningful connections in academic library environments.

### KEYWORDS

visible difference, connection, empathy, inclusivity, user experience

### INTRODUCTION

“We all have marks on our face. This is the map that shows where we've been and it's never, ever ugly.” — Auggie Pullman, *Wonder* (2017).

This line has always resonated with me, and I will reference the film numerous times throughout this article.

I was born with a rare craniofacial condition called craniofrontonasal dysplasia (CFND), which I did not inherit. The unpredictability of this condition has been a mental challenge; it can feel unfair when life-altering conditions appear unexpectedly. If you are someone who sits there thinking “why me?”, then I empathise. I have had many moments like that throughout my life.

I carry many stories on my face as a result of my visible difference. As a library assistant in a public-facing academic role, I am often taken at face value therefore, I value my face. I am not solely referring to my physical appearance either. As a member of a user-facing, student-centred library team, my professional face and overall character carry significant weight in how successful I am in my career.

### MY EXPERIENCE LIVING WITH A VISIBLE DIFFERENCE

The term ‘visible difference’ is defined as “physical appearance that is different to the societal norm” (University of the West of England, n.d). I am happy that visible difference is now being researched in an in-depth way in both the medical and surgical spheres but for me, the psychological impacts are equally, if not more important.

My condition has impacted the shape of my face, the length of one of my legs, the shape of my shoulders, my hair texture, and nail strength. For many, it may be surprising to realise how extensively a medical condition shapes my appearance. Some people might assume that my hair type is inherited, or that my years of playing youth sports are to blame for my weak nails. Now the hours spent on a GAA all-weather pitch, in all weathers, certainly didn't help, but no, all of these things are symptoms of CFND. The medical aspects are complex but what most affects my daily life — especially in a public-facing role — is living with a visible difference.

While family, friends, and medical professionals may say this condition does not define me, I have learned that it does—and that understanding this is essential for professional growth. This understanding informs how I live, work, and how I strive to support others. I have long sought to bridge the gap between my personal journey and my professional experience in customer service.

Earlier this year, I took on an additional role and began serving as a Public Contributor for Children Health Ireland's Craniofacial Research Group (CRG). CRG meetings are hosted monthly at Children's University Hospital, Temple Street and chaired by Mr Dylan Murray, Consultant Paediatric Plastic Surgeon and Lead Clinician for the National Paediatric Craniofacial Centre (NPCC). My role involves providing patient and family insights based on my experience transitioning from paediatric to adult clinics. I attend alongside other NPCC team members, and we discuss and review current surgical and psychological projects.

### **PERSONAL INSIGHT INFORMS PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE**

For much of my life, I avoided defining myself by my condition, working hard to challenge assumptions. Integrating my lived experience into my professional identity is now crucial for me and I am still relatively early in my librarianship career. This perspective informs my work at Technological University Dublin (TU Dublin), where I aim to enhance understanding of visibility, empathy, and human connection in public-facing roles.

Those born with visible differences know what it is to be “read” before speaking. Over time, I learned not only to be read but to read others — tuning into subtle cues, unspoken discomfort, and ways people reveal themselves unintentionally. My current role centres on helping students navigate resources, spaces, and systems, but the moments between questions — grounded in empathy, patience, and presence — are often the most significant. These attributes align with user experience (UX) principles and inclusive service delivery, where understanding emotional and social context is essential to supporting users effectively.

### **SELF-CARE AND PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY**

In any public-facing role, emotional labour is an inherent part of the work. We manage not only questions and tasks, but also the feelings that circulate around us — stress, confusion, anxiety, or sometimes joy and relief. For me, there is an added layer: the constant, silent awareness of my visibility. Being visibly different has taught me that care is both inward and outward. The more I understand and accept myself, the better I can care for others. This mirrors empathy-driven approaches in library service, which emphasise reflective practice and emotional intelligence as cornerstones of effective customer interaction.

A disconnect between internal self-perception and external presentation can hinder public-facing work. Part of maintaining that alignment for me has involved prioritising self-care. A concrete example of this is my approach to hair care. For years, I spent hours each week struggling to wash and dry my thick, curly

hair, which was exhausting. There were hours of frustration and tears, often late at night or in the early hours of the morning, in university accommodation, trying to avoid disturbing my housemates. Recognising the impact of this on both my wellbeing and professional presence, a few years ago, I decided to prioritise self-care by visiting a hairdresser once a week. This forty-five-minute weekly routine now leaves me relaxed and confident, allowing me to focus fully on my work.

A small act of self-care like this illustrates how attending to personal needs directly supports professional presence and effectiveness. It demonstrates how nurturing self-awareness is both a personal and professional strategy. For me, it allows me to maintain presence, patience, and empathy for the students I serve. While this particular self-care may seem like vanity and even highlight certain financial privilege, what it actually does is underline the importance of self-care in supporting a public-facing role. By managing the aspects of my appearance that previously caused stress, I reduce distractions and can engage more fully and authentically with library users.

I often reflect on the idea of seeing and being seen. For those of us with visible differences, being seen is unavoidable but being understood is something we build through connection. In the daily rhythm of library work, understanding can be cultivated through small acts of kindness, presence, and respect, both for others and for ourselves.

### REPRESENTATION, EMPATHY, AND USER EXPERIENCE

I vividly remember seeing *Wonder* (2017) for the first time at age twenty-one. *Wonder* depicts the life of Auggie Pullman, a young boy born with a rare medical facial condition that affects the shape and appearance of his ears, eyes, cheekbones, and chin. The film not only delves into his own experience of the world, living with an appearance difference, but how that affects his family. There were many themes that reflected my lived experience so intensely and accurately that at times it was hard for me to remain in my seat, however, I stayed because I was in awe of the representation that I felt was given to me in that moment.

I think because I saw the film as a young woman, Julia Roberts' depiction of the maternal fears and anxieties for her child was what really struck a chord with me the most. I could relate to Auggie because in a lot of ways, I was him as a child. It was very powerful for me to see the interplay between the two parents (father played by Owen Wilson) because those conversations had been kept away from me. That is as it should be, and is, of course, not a criticism. My parents gave me all the courage in the world to just go out there and be me but as an adult, I understand now that they would have had their trepidations.

Without too many spoilers, because I truly would recommend the film to everyone, it does end on a happy note. Auggie has friends, he has found his own little place in the world, in school, for now. I think that's why it was a poignant moment for my family when my parents gave me their insight. They said something to the effect of "the ending was a bit too happy-ever-after", however, I interpreted the ending as "happy for now." I don't blame my parents for how they initially reacted; the film does end on a very high note and I think our conversations and reflections afterwards were needed. When I told my mother that I was writing this piece, without any indication from me that I would be discussing *Wonder*, she spoke of the day we saw the film and how it was a teaching moment it was for her.

'Yes, Auggie is happy, but he is still a child.'



‘I was a happy child too.’

The complexities of life for those with visible differences extend far beyond moments of recognition or acceptance. I had a great group of friends in school, who accepted and supported me. However, Auggie will one day become a teenager, and have to deal with more obstacles - then he will become an adult - a whole different stratosphere of learning how to navigate life when you know you stand out. I would personally love to see more representation of adults with appearance differences.

The themes that I am referring to, the insecurities and anxieties, are, of course, not limited to those of us with appearance differences – that is the universal reality of being a human. I am just better able to speak on my own nuanced understanding of what it’s like to walk into a room and stand out. I know that some people will never have met anyone with a craniofacial condition before. I also know that the stares and double takes are less about judgement and more about curiosity. I am a curious person too.

As a library professional, my lived experience enables me to meet students as whole people, providing guidance, support, and empathy grounded in this perspective. Short interactions at a library desk rarely allow for “happily ever after” outcomes. What we can offer are “happy for now” moments and encourage students to return as their needs evolve. As Steven Bell (2019) notes: small moments of joy accumulate into meaningful satisfaction. I experience this joy when helping a student locate a book or resolve an account issue. This doesn’t mean that that student will never have stress or anxiety in college again - a week later they are likely to not be able to print properly; they won’t be able to format their table of contents in Word for their thesis or locate the right room for their lecture. Surely though, if we can eliminate one stress from their lives, that must count for something, right?

As Auggie reminds us, “Be kind, for everyone is fighting a hard battle. And if you really want to see what people are, all you have to do is look” (Wonder, 2017). I strive to ensure my professional face conveys both value and recognition to others - a face shaped through years of effort. I feel fulfilment when recognised as a library professional—I will even embrace the glasses, the bun in my hair and the cardigans if it means that I am happy with how I appear.

### **EQUITY, DIVERSITY, AND INCLUSION IN PRACTICE**

Technological University Dublin (TU Dublin) articulates its commitment to EDI principles in its 2023 – 2028 Equality Statement as does RCSI in its 2024-2027 EDI Strategy Document. I refer only to Dublin-based universities here but all of them, including Trinity College Dublin, University College Dublin and Dublin City University, have well-researched policies in this area. What is worth noting, however, is that appearance differences such as craniofacial differences, generally fall under the umbrella protected ground of “disability” (Employment Equality Act, 1998), which includes medical conditions. I, on the other hand, would, advocate for “visible difference” to be regarded as open to a separate form of discrimination as currently, protection only appears to exist when it overlaps with one of the other nine listed grounds.

I am personally proud to be an Irish library professional, a member of the most accepting and welcoming community. I couldn't have chosen a better area to work in as it has allowed me to just be “Maeve” and I have never felt as though my difference has affected my professional life - if anything, it has helped me thrive in my work and be an advocate for change.

## CONCLUSION

Reflecting on these institutional frameworks, I also consider how my own experiences with visible difference inform my professional practice. Over time, I've developed a heightened sensitivity to tone, body language, and atmosphere: the small cues that reveal how someone is feeling beneath the surface. This helps me a lot with developing supportive working relationships with both my colleagues and with library users. There are also certain quirks I only later realised were connected to the way I look and which have informed both my personal and professional identities. For example, I prefer being the first person to enter a room rather than the last. If I don't enter first, there is that agonising moment when everyone is waiting: the staring, the subtle attention it can all be overwhelming. This sensitivity helps me connect with students who are nervous about asking questions or who feel out of place in the university environment. I can sense when someone needs reassurance before information. I understand, in a quiet way, what it feels like to be looked at, to feel uncertain about belonging. In this way, my lived experience informs my professional one: empathy becomes not just an ideal, but a practised skill rooted in daily reality.

My experience has not been about overcoming my appearance difference but about integrating it into who I am as a professional and as a person. In doing so, I hope I contribute, in some modest way, to a culture where every student, staff member, and visitor feels they belong — not despite difference, but alongside it.

## REFERENCES

- Bell, S. (2019, November 5). *Academic librarians and the pursuit of happiness: From the Bell Tower*. Library Journal. Retrieved from <https://www.libraryjournal.com/story/Academic-Librarians-Pursuit-of-Happiness-From-the-Bell-Tower>
- Chbosky, S. (Director). (2017). *Wonder* [Film]. Lionsgate.
- Dublin City University. (n.d.). *Dignity and Respect — Work and Study Policy*. DCU. Retrieved from <https://www.dcu.ie/policies/dignity-and-respect-work-and-study-policy>
- Employment Equality Act 1998, No. 21/1998. Irish Statute Book. Retrieved from <https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/1998/act/21/enacted/en/html>
- Equality (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2015, No. 43/2015. Irish Statute Book. Retrieved from <https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2015/act/43/enacted/en/html>
- National Organization for Rare Disorders. (n.d.). *Craniofrontonasal Dysplasia (CFND)*. In Rare Disease Database. Retrieved from <https://rarediseases.org/rare-diseases/craniofrontonasal-dysplasia>
- Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland. (2022). *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in Healthcare*. Dublin: RCSI Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Unit. Retrieved from <https://www.rcsi.com/equality-diversity-and-inclusion>

Technological University Dublin. (2023). *Equality Statement 2023–2028*. Retrieved from <https://www.tudublin.ie/media/website/explore/about-the-university/equality-and-diversity/TU-Dublin-Equality-Statement-2023-2028.pdf>

Trinity College Dublin. (2023.). *Dignity & Respect Policy* [PDF]. Trinity College Dublin. Retrieved from <https://www.tcd.ie/media/tcd/about/policies/pdfs/hr/dignity-and-respect.pdf>

University College Dublin. (2022). *Bullying & Harassment Policy*. UCD Dignity & Respect. Retrieved from <https://www.ucd.ie/dignityandrespect/policies/bullyingharassmentpolicy/>

University of the West of England, Bristol. (n.d.). *Research at the Centre for Appearance Research (CAR)*. Retrieved from <https://www.uwe.ac.uk/research/centres-and-groups/appearance/research#a70ae38c9-3d1f-4f75-bf2e-582d1e5a0053>

---

Maeve Kerins was born with craniofrontonasal dysplasia (CFND) and spent her childhood and adolescence being treated by the National Paediatric Craniofacial Centre in Temple Street Hospital in Dublin. Maeve is currently employed in Technological University Dublin (TU Dublin) Library Services as part of the Teaching and Learning Team. Maeve is also Co-Chair of TU Dublin's Equality Diversity and Inclusion Champions Network and in addition, serves as a Public Contributor for Children Health Ireland's Craniofacial Research Group.



## Regular Feature - Librarians of Note from the Past

### **Marcia Crocker Noyes: The Librarian Who Never Left**

**Meg Fairfax Fielding**

Director of the History of Medicine, Medical & Chirurgical Faculty, Maryland, USA

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Marcia Crocker Noyes was a founding member of the Medical Library Association of the United States of America. At the invitation of the famed physician, Dr William Osler, Marcia became the Librarian of the Medical & Chirurgical Faculty of the State of Maryland in the early 1890s and held that position until her death in 1946. One of the first leaders in the profession of librarianship, Marcia was also a Suffragist.

#### **BACKGROUND**

The Medical & Chirurgical Faculty of the State of Maryland, founded in 1799, is the fifth oldest medical society in the United States. For most of its first century, it led a rather peripatetic existence, interrupted by various moves, the American Civil War, and lack of leadership.

That began to change in 1890, when the famed physician, Dr William Osler, came to Baltimore to open the Johns Hopkins Hospital and School of Medicine. He immediately became a member of what was known as the “Faculty” and resurrected the library, which had also moved from place to place, and whose books were mostly out of date. Osler got rid of the librarian who had left things in a shambles, and consulted with his good friend, Dr Bernard Steiner, who was the Head Librarian at Baltimore’s Enoch Pratt Free Library.

Osler was looking for a librarian who had actually worked in a library and understood how a library worked. The lack of medical knowledge was not important, but being a self-starter, and having an innate intelligence was. Dr Steiner, whose family had been associated with the Faculty for decades, suggested Marcia Crocker Noyes, a young librarian who worked in the Pratt’s circulation department. Within two weeks, Marcia had a new job, and a new home! At that time, medical librarians were required to live at the library in the event a physician phoned in the middle of the night and needed a medical book. The librarian would fetch the book and meet the physician in the reading room. After reading the book, he would be on his way back to his patient.

So began a 50-year journey of the Faculty and Marcia Crocker Noyes, who literally gave her life to the library. She was treated with some disdain when she first arrived, mainly because of her youth, her gender, and her lack of medical knowledge. But she had Dr Osler in her pocket, and his friendship went a long way to ensuring her quick acceptance by the membership.

The Faculty was a neutral ground between the eleven medical schools in Baltimore at the time, Johns Hopkins and the University of Maryland being the largest. There were professional, scientific, and medical meetings several evenings a week hosting physicians from Baltimore and the surrounding areas.

Additionally, the physicians came to the building to read medical journals to which the Faculty subscribed or browse through the books in the ever-increasing library.

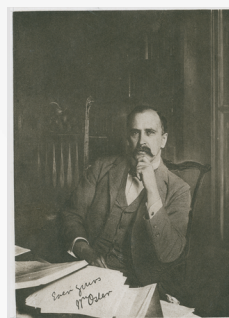
**Figure 1: Marcia Crocker Noyes, circa 1895**

The MedChi Collection is licensed under [CC0 1.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)



**Figure 2: Sir William Osler, MD, circa 1903**

The MedChi Collection is licensed under [CC0 1.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)



Dr Osler was a firm believer in men of all ages interacting and learning from each other. The mix of physicians and staff from the various medical schools in Baltimore ensured that Marcia knew the librarians from the other medical schools and hospitals. So, when the idea of an association of medical libraries was floated, many medical librarians were already known to each other. Due to the affiliation of McGill University in Montreal, Dr Osler's medical home, with the Faculty, McGill's librarian, Margaret Charlton and Marcia had an established friendship.

Although Dr Osler was unable to attend the first Medical Library Association (MLA) planning meeting, he paid for Marcia and Miss Elizabeth Thiess from Hopkins to attend and when the early members were questioned as to why a medical library group was needed when the American Library Association already existed, the answer was, "their problems are not our problems."

Among the main objectives of the MLA were exchanging library duplicates; securing the libraries of retired or deceased physicians; distributing journals of various medical societies; and searching auction catalogues for antiquarian books (as we continue to do today). Dr George Gould from the Philadelphia Medical Journal, who had a close association with publishers of medical texts, persuaded them to save their remainders for smaller medical libraries. To give you an idea of the numbers involved in the Exchange, in 1901, 2,443 books were distributed, and 2,126 books were received. Even today with computers and spreadsheets, this would be a daunting task!

Early on, Marcia agreed to take on the Exchange with the help of a part-time employee. The Exchange ensured that duplicate books or journals went to the libraries which needed them, and that libraries which had the duplicates could be assured that their books would go where needed. As with many things MLA, the Exchange lived a somewhat vagabond life. Marcia oversaw the Exchange from 1900 to 1904, and then again from 1909 when the new building was opened, until she relinquished the responsibility in 1926.

In 1909, after moving around the city of Baltimore, each time to larger and larger quarters, the Faculty built their next (and final) building, incorporating space for large and small meetings, a banquet room, offices, and best of all, a four-story stacks library, capable of holding more than 60,000 books. Marcia worked as a de facto project manager for the building's design and construction, in part because it would be her home. Until her death, she lived in a penthouse flat on the top floor, along with her maid and a succession of Chow Chow dogs.



**Figure 3: MedChi's 1909 Building**

The MedChi Collection is licensed under [CC0 1.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)



During the five years that the Exchange operated out of the Brooklyn, New York, Medical Society, the MLA realised exactly how much Marcia did to keep the Exchange up and running in an orderly fashion. It was also during that period that Dr Osler became President of the MLA and realised how important it was to keep the Exchange as an integral part of the MLA.

Marcia was also involved in another MLA venture that had its highs and lows – the Bulletin. The Bulletin was scheduled to be a quarterly journal-type publication, however, that rarely happened and the change of names every few years didn't help. The Bulletins had a very ambitious tagline from renowned jurist and Associate Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court, Oliver Wendell Holmes, "Libraries are the standing armies of civilization," but if civilization had to depend on the journals, then it would not have stood for long.

Once Marcia and her good friend from Baltimore, Dr John Ruhräh, poliomyelitis pioneer and medical historian, began editing the journals, the schedule stabilised, and she and other colleagues continued editing until 1926. With the instability of the journals and the Exchange, the glue that held the MLA together over its first two decades was the annual conference, which took place in a different location each year.

The first two meetings were in Philadelphia, then in Atlantic City, Baltimore, Chicago, Boston, St. Louis and others. It was at the 1901 meeting that Dr Osler was elected as President of the organization. He stepped down in 1904, most likely due to his incredible non-stop schedule of teaching, writing, and travelling, or with the idea of his possible appointment as Regius Professor at Oxford.

Perhaps because of her position at the Faculty, Marcia was very progressive. She was a member of the suffragist movement whose meetings were frequently held in the Faculty building. Marcia bought her first automobile in 1916 and was driving even before women were allowed to vote in the United States. She was friends with many of the women physicians in the area, a number of whom graduated either from the Woman's Medical College in Baltimore or Johns Hopkins School of Medicine, which had been required to admit women from its first days.

As with many other Baltimoreans, Marcia took most of the summer months off. Baltimore is a southern city, with brutally hot and humid summers. She literally decamped to Lake George in the Adirondack Mountains in up-state New York, where she ran a summer camp for girls in their early teens. She had the main building floated out to the camp's secluded location and then kept the campers busy with the "pleasures and freedom of a gypsy life" close to nature.

Although Marcia had been involved in the MLA since its inception, it was not until 1933, at the 35<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting, that she was elected President of the organisation. She was the first non-physician and was

jokingly referred to as being the un-medicated President! She had a few items on her presidential agenda, including officially incorporating the MLA and adapting an official seal, which had been designed many years earlier. She spent a significant amount of time travelling around the United States visiting member libraries and meeting their staff.

Marcia was offered the opportunity to continue as President, but she declined. She had accomplished what she wanted to do and believed in bringing in new blood to the organisation. As much as Marcia loved to travel – she actually drove from New England to Louisiana, a distance of more than 1,500 miles – after a frenetic year, she wanted to slow down a bit.

Marcia continued to attend MLA meetings, including the 1940 meeting which took place in Oregon. This necessitated a 3,000 mile cross-country trip by train from the east to the west coast which took almost a week. But she was slowing considerably, and her staff, which was just Marcia and a houseman when she began in 1896, had now increased to 22 people, including the houseman, who would eventually work at the Faculty for 56 years.

The 1946 MLA meeting was held at Yale University, and both Marcia and Dr William Francis, Dr Osler's nephew from the Osler Library at McGill University in Montreal, managed to attend the meeting. They had been close friends since they had first met in Baltimore in the late 1890s and continued their friendship through the years as bibliophiles, MLA members, and at MLA meetings. But this would be the last meeting for both.

**Figure 4: Marcia Crocker Noyes, circa 1920**

The MedChi Collection is licensed under [CC0 1.0](#)



**Figure 5: Marcia Crocker Noyes, circa 1934**

The MedChi Collection is licensed under [CC0 1.0](#)



Although Marcia was determined to celebrate her 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary on the exact date of her hiring at the Faculty, the physicians realized she was sicker than she knew and persuaded her to have her retirement/anniversary party in April, just after she returned from Yale. She was already poorly, and had lost her voice, so couldn't make any speeches at the party. She declined steadily over the summer and died in November of 1946, just three days after her original hire date.

Accolades came in from across the country, including a telegram from Dr Francis saying: "Well done good and faithful Sister Marcia. Farewell to Osler's earliest from his latest librarian." The MLA Bulletin wrote this: "May the spirit of friendliness and devotion to service, which Miss Noyes so well exemplified, remain with us as we carry on in the field of medical libraries which she loved so well."

Shortly before she died, she said this of herself, "If I have accomplished anything, let that speak for me, as while making a living, I have tried to make a life."

But that's not the end of the story.

Before her retirement, Marcia threatened to take a few days off and then come back and "haint" the building to make sure things got done. Marcia had lived in our building from its opening in 1909 until her death in 1946. And she's still here. She moves things around, wanders the halls and makes her presence known to those who are receptive. Music turns off and on, typewriter keys are heard clicking, and lost paintings suddenly appear in our stacks.

People have counted footsteps climbing the main staircase when no one is there. When they replicate the steps, they lead to Marcia's old flat. Just before we opened our small medical museum, the installation crew kept hearing footsteps walking up and down the hallway. The night before the opening, when we were working late, the lightweight plastic protecting some paintings began to shimmer in the non-existent breeze.

We try and explain what's happening, but really, the only explanation is that it is Marcia, the librarian who never left.

---

Meg Fairfax Fielding is the Director of the History of Medicine at the Medical & Chirurgical Faculty and also manages the collection of portraits and sculptures of physicians dating to the late 1700s and the rare book collection, with the oldest dating to 1567. She is a Fellow at the American Osler Society and has lectured there several times. Meg has just completed her second book, a biography of Marcia entitled "Marcia Crocker Noyes: The Librarian Who Never Left", available digitally [here](#). Funds raised from sales will go to support the lasting mission of MedChi's archives.



## Regular Feature - A Day in the Life

### **A Day in the Life of a Medical Librarian in an Academic Family Medicine Department**

**Alex Henigman**

Department of Family and Community Medicine, University of Missouri-Columbia, USA

#### **BACKGROUND**

Alex Henigman is the Medical Librarian for the Department of Family and Community Medicine at the University of Missouri-Columbia. The university was founded in 1839 in Columbia, Missouri and was the first public university west of the Mississippi River. It is Missouri's largest public research university. Alex tells us about her role as an embedded librarian in an academic department and provides us with a snapshot of what a typical working day looks like.

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Many medical librarians work within central health science libraries or hospital systems, serving broad audiences. My role is different: I am the Medical Librarian for the Department of Family and Community Medicine at the University of Missouri – Columbia, a position that is directly embedded within one academic department. My office sits alongside our research faculty and administrative staff, and my patrons are my colleagues. This allows me to build long-term relationships, tailor my support to the department's specific needs, and take part in projects that extend beyond traditional library services.

#### **MY SETTING**

Our department is multifaceted, with faculty, residents, fellows, and advanced practice providers spread across multiple clinics. In addition to patient care, we have clerkship, residency, and fellowship programs as well as an active research department focused on improving family and community health.

Since many of my colleagues are often off-site (at clinics, etc.), I rely heavily on Microsoft Teams and email to connect with them. I make a consistent effort to reach out so that everyone knows I am here and happy to help, whether they are working on a manuscript, preparing a quality improvement project, or troubleshooting access to resources.

I also stay involved in many internal activities, such as attending monthly research, clinical, and staff meetings, participating in research cohorts, and hosting our Clinical Algorithms Committee meeting each month. These gatherings give me insight into the department's priorities and help me anticipate the information needs of our department.

#### **MY RESPONSIBILITIES**

I believe that the foundation of my work is expert searching, which supports a wide range of our projects, from systematic reviews to clinical questions and quality improvement initiatives. I also assist faculty and residents with scholarly communication, including manuscript editing, guidance on journal selection, and scholarly profiles.

Another significant part of my role is resource navigation. I help colleagues access and use the tools they need for research, education, and clinical care. This includes not only our institution's library resources, but our department intranet, for which I also serve as webmaster. I provide one-on-one orientation for new faculty and staff, and participate yearly in our residents' orientation.

### **MY DAY**

As all librarians know, no two days are quite the same. What follows is a snapshot of one recent day in my work life.

I always start my morning by stopping by the main department office to say good morning, grab a cup of coffee, and check my mailbox. My office is just down the hall, and on the way back, I run into a clinician with a quick question about a journal submission. I offer to help by reformatting the paper for submission to a new journal – a task that will go on my to-do list for later in the day.

Once I'm in my office, I check my email and review my to-do list. I have author alerts set up for our faculty, and this morning I see that one of them has published a new article. I add the citation to our EndNote library and send the announcement to our communications staff.

I currently serve as Chair of the Education Committee for my regional chapter of the Medical Library Association. Today, our committee meets via Zoom to finalize details for an upcoming webinar we're hosting. After the meeting, I turn my attention to completing a PRESS (Peer Review of Electronic Search Strategies) request for a researcher in another department.

October is National Medical Librarians Month here in the US, so I prepare a flyer to be included in our department's October newsletter. Right after, a researcher contacts me about a grant deadline coming up tomorrow and asks if I can format the citations for the proposal.

My afternoon moves quickly. A staff member connects me with a Fellow who needs a literature search for an upcoming Grand Rounds presentation. A clinician requests a book that isn't part of our institution's collection, so I submit an ILL (interlibrary loan) request. I receive an email letting me know another ILL request has arrived for one of our residents. I take a quick walk to the Health Sciences Library to pick it up and deliver it to the residency suite.

Back at my desk, a Teams message pops up asking for help updating information for a systematic review. I hop into the chat to clarify details with the team.

As the day winds down, a clinician reaches out for EndNote help and assistance locating a dissertation. Once I've wrapped those up, I take a few quiet minutes to work on a poster design for an upcoming library conference.

Before I leave for the day, I revisit my to-do list, which keeps me organized and sane. I sort tasks into two categories: what must be done tomorrow and what can wait another day.

### **REFLECTIONS**

When I started this position, it was my first official role with the title of "librarian." I had the academic background, but being the only librarian in the department meant a steep learning curve. Over time, I've become more integrated with my colleagues, and my confidence and impact have grown.



Working closely with the same group of people has been incredibly rewarding. I've seen research ideas grow into published work and supported projects that directly improve patient care. While working alone can be challenging, I stay connected to other librarians through our central health sciences library and continuing education opportunities. My department has also been supportive of my growth and professional development.

## CONCLUSION

Medical librarians can demonstrate the power of collaboration. By being part of the department's daily work, I provide targeted support that advances both patient care and scholarship. For librarians entering the field, my advice is to focus on relationships. Get to know your users, listen to their needs, and embrace lifelong learning.

I've noticed that the smallest moments are often the most impactful. When a faculty member expresses surprise at how quickly I've found an answer or sends a thank you email for providing access to a resource, I'm reminded of the value of this work. To me, it's about the little things that make the lives of those around me easier.



## Regular Feature - Librarians in Interesting Roles

### **Becoming Tusla's First Librarian**

**Ian Feerick**

Tusla Library & Information Service

 <https://orcid.org/0009-0008-5237-4094>

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.

## REFERENCES

Child and Family Agency Act 2013, Irish Statute Book, 8(1)(f). (2013).

<https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2013/act/40/enacted/en/html>

Library Association of Ireland. (2013). *The Library Association of Ireland Code of Professional Practice*.

<https://www.libraryassociation.ie/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Code-of-Professional-Practice-reviewed-May-2019-v3.pdf>

National Research Office. (2024). *Driving Innovation and Continued Service Improvement: Tusla Research Strategy 2024 – 2029*. Tusla: Child and Family Agency. <https://doi.org/10.52516/ULDC2855>

Tusla – About Us. (n.d.). <https://www.tusla.ie/about/>



## Regular Feature - Reflections

# A Reflection on Forty Years Working in Libraries

Helen Fallon

### BACKGROUND

Helen Fallon retired from her post as Deputy University Librarian at Maynooth University in 2022 and here she reflects on a life in librarianship and shares insights and advice for those at all stages of their career.

### INTRODUCTION

My library career began in 1979, as a student shelver in what was then St. Patrick's College Maynooth (SPCM), and is now Maynooth University (MU). I retired in September 2022 from the post of Deputy University Librarian, a senior leadership post, at Maynooth University.

I'm pleased to take this opportunity to reflect on those years and hopefully distil some insights/thoughts that might be of use to librarians what ever stage they are at in their career. For convenience and to help me gather my thoughts together I've given topics headings.

### BE PHYSICALLY VISIBLE

Librarians have certainly increased their physical visibility since my career started, but in my view it is an area that needs more development. This can be as straightforward as meeting people in your organization – outside the library – for a coffee and conversation about their work. I was fortunate that in the early stages of my career I was encouraged to get out and network, although the term network hadn't come into usage at that time. People were usually very happy to talk about their work/research. I was frequently struck by the lack of knowledge of the academics I met about what the library could offer them.

Back in 1986, I was somewhat apprehensive to learn that in my post as Business Librarian in what was then NIHED (National Institute for Higher Education Dublin), now DCU (Dublin City University), I would sit on programme boards for courses offered by the Business School. My manager suggested I bring up the library where possible at these meetings. I came to meetings with what I wanted to say written down and more or less memorised. This might have been information about a new journal or service. Later, when I was more confident, I served on university committees and tried to make myself visible, again being well prepared, which is really key to being an effective member of a committee. Take time to study the agenda before the meeting, and see where you might be able to have useful input. This applies to both meetings in person and on zoom.

### BE STRATEGIC

While libraries were always involved in planning, it wasn't until the 1990's that I encountered the concept of strategic planning. This process gave time to reflect and identify priorities using established tools such as SWOT (Strength, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis. I was one of the theme leaders of the first DCU Library Strategic plan. One of my tasks was to set out the current and future trends in higher education, as background to the plan. Through sourcing statistical data, I was able to identify trends and projected future developments both in Ireland and internationally. This was my first formal experience of using data for planning. It made me realise that evidence-based context is key to planning.



I think that library strategic plans improved in the following years in that they became more closely aligned to organisational strategy and goals. In smaller libraries it might make sense to integrate the library strategic plan into the broader organisational one, rather than have an individual plan. Even if there is a library plan, the library should be visible in the organisational plan.

Of course strategy doesn't just relate to strategic planning. You can plan your work and your career strategically. In relation to day-to-day work, it's worth taking some time to reflect and monitor how you spend your time. On occasion, I spent too long on tasks that did not merit the time and effort. Something that could have helped me was having greater clarity around a task, asking more questions from the requestor/delegator and having a clearer idea of the purpose and expected outcomes. Also consider what the impact is of the task(s) you are doing – for the requestor, for the library, for the organisation, for you. Is it low, medium or high?

### **PLAN YOUR CAREER**

I began working fulltime in libraries in the very depressed 1980's. There was an air of gloom about with high unemployment in the country. It was just a decade since the marriage bar – where women in civil service positions had to resign on marriage – had been lifted. When I got my first permanent post as Assistant Librarian in NIHE Dublin, three years after finishing the library course, I was thrilled and didn't think beyond the joy of having a permanent job in a time where many people were emigrating. I continued working happily for three years, learning a great deal and really enjoying being part of a dynamic team in what was a very young and enthusiastic organisation. But after three years as Business Librarian I felt I needed to do something new. I had worked for two years in a medical library in Saudi Arabia after finishing the library course and felt I'd like to work overseas again. I was fortunate to secure a career break for two years and this time I opted for a post with Voluntary Services Overseas (VSO) teaching librarianship at the University of Sierra Leone, which was a sharp contrast to the expatriate experience in Saudi Arabia. When I returned to DCU I moved sideways to the post of Science and Engineering Librarian. Even though it was a sideways move, it offered the opportunity to learn about a new field of librarianship. It's worth thinking from time to time about potential moves, be they sideways or upwards, and consider the advantages and disadvantages. If it's not possible to move, consider whether it is possible to take on a new area of responsibility and perhaps drop or delegate something you are very familiar with. Most of us find it hard to give up projects we've initiated, but it is really important to delegate effectively and develop staff. Perhaps ask yourself, how much you are learning from a particular task/area of responsibility.

In recent years some Irish librarians have moved into senior administration posts in their organisations. This offers a really good opportunity to experience your organisation from a different perspective.

### **AVAIL OF EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES**

In 1994, three years after returning from Sierra Leone, I began an MA in Women's Studies as a part-time student in University College Dublin. This was my first significant educational endeavour since completing a Postgraduate Diploma in Librarianship at UCD in 1982. Studying and attending classes at night time for two years, was very demanding. It was a different experience to my degree, which I had completed in 1980, and which had been based on examinations. Here, I was doing modules in a choice of subjects and writing 5,000-word essays. Now, instead of helping people with their research, I was the researcher. I received 50% funding from DCU towards the degree. It was a big commitment but it was worthwhile and I believe it helped me in my application for a more senior post in DCU.

These days quite a lot of librarians have Masters Degrees and the PhD is increasing in popularity. It is worth considering doing a PhD and if possible aligning it to an area of research within your organisation. If it's of value to the organisation they might fund it. The taught doctorate is worth considering, especially if, like me,

you like the idea of a structured programme. If doing further study isn't possible, there are lots of short courses – online and in person, professional reading, learning new skills on the job and also academic writing. Writing for publication offers an opportunity to explore a topic and there is no financial cost involved. It's also a really good way of sharing your knowledge with others, and helping to build up the body of knowledge on a topic.

In 1996, having finished my Masters Degree, I applied for a temporary sub-librarian post in DCU. This post was then called Head of Reader Services and involved managing all frontline services and the subject librarian team. While this was a contract for two years, when the post came up as permanent I was fortunate to have gained really valuable experience managing people and was successful in my application. Two years later I left to take up the post of Deputy Librarian at Maynooth University. It's important to try to get some people management experience if you are going to go for senior posts. Managing people is challenging but ultimately very rewarding.

### **CREATE NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL NETWORKS**

A significant development in my career was the arrival of an English librarian to DCU in 1992. He was extremely outward looking and encouraged us to attend conferences in Ireland and overseas. Fortunately, this coincided with airline deregulation, so air fares dropped in price and travelling to the UK was no longer prohibitively expensive. The Library became involved in projects with other European universities as part of the European Union (EU) Libraries Programme, which was established in 1990. These projects helped us to engage in the broader European academic library discourse and to create European and international links. I was fortunate to have a role in the EQLIPSE project, which focused on developing software to support quality management and performance measurement in libraries. This developed my understanding of quality measurement, which was to become a requirement under the 1997 Irish Universities Act. I enjoyed meeting librarians with different backgrounds and experiences and had the opportunity to present at meetings in Barcelona and Greece. The engagement helped us to look outwards and measure the service against international standards, understanding we were part of a bigger story.

Much later, at Maynooth University, I participated in the ERASMUS programme, visiting a Swedish university library. These programmes are typically from three days to one week. If you are not in a position to travel, the LAI (Library Association of Ireland) Job Swap initiative allows for one day visits to libraries. It is worth exploring if there are similar opportunities in different library sectors, and if not perhaps initiate discussion and explore what can be achieved.

### **WRITE FOR PUBLICATION**

The DCU Librarian who joined us from the UK had a strong track record of academic publishing, which was unusual for librarians in Ireland in the 1990s. He encouraged me to send my first article on working as a librarian in Sierra Leone to *An Leabharlann: The Irish Library*. The subsequent publication of the article was a source of great joy to me. I realised that I didn't need to be a senior librarian to publish: I just needed to be committed to putting the time and effort into writing and, through the process, learn, develop and extend my skills. There were no formal programmes and any librarians writing were, like me, doing it outside of work. I wasted a lot of time initially – putting everything I knew about a topic down, over-researching and not having a clear idea of where I was writing for and what I was writing. Later, I learned to clarify with myself what it was I was writing and where I aimed to publish, before I began.

I subsequently ran workshops on writing for academic publications. I wrote and published the key information/practical guidelines from these workshops (Fallon, 2009; Fallon, 2010), which I hope will be of use to others in their academic writing or when running academic writing programmes. I also ran two academic writing months in Maynooth University (with different groups of library staff). The details of how I

structured these are in the final referenced article (Fallon, 2022), which might be handy for anyone wanting to replicate them.

### JOIN THE LIBRARY ASSOCIATION OF IRELAND (LAI)

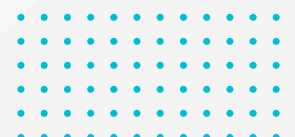
I joined the Library Association of Ireland (LAI) in order to engage with the profession and also because we had been advised to do so on the postgraduate course in UCD. I was certainly of the impression that it was something that I should have on my CV. I undertook both the Associateship (ALAI) and the Fellowship (FLAI). I found these reflective processes gave me an opportunity to consider where I was at in my career and what new skills/knowledge I needed to acquire. I would recommend undertaking the LAI qualifications and also serving on LAI committees, which is a really good way to develop your skills and knowledge.

### CONCLUDING COMMENTS

At a conference, I remember a speaker giving the advice “Don’t wait for clarity, keep moving” and that has stayed with me. You are, to some extent, trying to operate strategically in a world that is shifting, so it’s important to keep on going on. Enjoy the journey and remember the saying attributed to Ralph Waldo Emerson “Life is a journey, not a destination.”

### REFERENCES

- Fallon, H. (2009) The Academic Writing Toolkit: Writing for Peer-Reviewed and Professional Journals  
SCONUL Focus 45, 66-71. <https://mural.maynoothuniversity.ie/id/eprint/1387/1/HFSconul20.pdf>
- Fallon, H. (2010) Supporting Health Sciences Librarians to Publish: the Dublin EAHIL Academic Writing  
Workshop, Journal of the European Association for Health Information and Libraries, Vol. 6 (1), pp.  
3-7. <https://mural.maynoothuniversity.ie/id/eprint/1872/1/HFJEAHILRev.pdf>
- Fallon, H. (2022). AcWriMo@Maynooth University Library: A guide to running an academic writing  
programme. Insights, Vol. 35, pp. 1-9. <https://mural.maynoothuniversity.ie/id/eprint/15920/1/568-5944-1-PB.pdf>



## Regular Feature

# SHOUT

## Sharing Hints, Outcomes and Useful Techniques

In this feature we draw together some of the excellent knowledge and information that our international colleagues have recently produced.

If you have seen or published an open access study that should be highlighted in our regular SHOUT feature, please submit the reference, link and short summary (max 150 words) to [hslj.hslg@gmail.com](mailto:hslj.hslg@gmail.com)

### NEW REPORT

**Coffey, A., Joy, C., Hayes, A., McCabe, G., O'Dwyer, L., McCarney, E., Clarke, R., Madden, F., Stokes, D., Quinn, C., Dalton, M. & Noonan, E. (eds.) (2025) Navigating Open Research - A Guide for Early Career Researchers. CONUL Research Group. <https://doi.org/10.33178/10468/17586>**

This guide is designed to support early career researchers to navigate the principles and practices of open research, including open access publishing, data sharing, and responsible research metrics. It offers practical advice, useful resources, a step by step checklist and insights into how open research can enhance visibility, collaboration, and impact. It aims to foster a culture of openness, transparency, and collaboration within the research community. The guide is openly licensed and freely available to use, adapt and remix. Although aimed at early career researchers, the current emphasis on data management and open publishing means that all researchers, librarians and information specialists should find the information and resource links in this report to be useful.

### USEFUL FREE JOURNALS

- Journal of the European Association for Health Information and Libraries (JEAHIL) <https://ojs.eahil.eu/JEAHIL/index>
- Journal of Health Information and Libraries Australasia (JOHILA) <https://www.johila.org/index.php/Johila>
- Journal of the Medical Library Association (JMLA) <https://jmla.mlanet.org/ojs/jmla>
- Evidence Based Library and Information Practice (EBLIP) <https://journals.library.ualberta.ca/ebliip/index.php/EBLIP>

### SELECTIONS FROM [EAHIL 2025, VOL. 21 NO. 2](#)

This issue of the EAHIL journal focuses on artificial intelligence and libraries, beginning with an editorial that provides a brief history and overview of the included articles.

**Ožura, D. (2025). Editorial - Artificial intelligence and libraries. Journal of EAHIL, 21(2), 2-3.**  
<https://ojs.eahil.eu/JEAHIL/article/view/678>

In this issue of JEAHIL, five studies by authors from Finland, the Netherlands, Italy and the United Kingdom

explore the impact of artificial intelligence (AI), particularly generative AI, on health information retrieval, library services and user behaviour, emphasising its potential benefits and challenges in medical and health-related settings. These studies emphasise the importance of human oversight, the critical evaluation of AI outputs and ethical considerations such as transparency, bias and data privacy, emphasising that AI should augment rather than replace human expertise. They also highlight the necessity of AI literacy and professional training for librarians and information professionals so they can effectively integrate AI tools into their workflows while maintaining accuracy and trustworthiness.

**Cox, A. (2025). Artificial intelligence and health information literacy. *Journal of EAHIL*, 21(2), 4-6**

<https://ojs.eahil.eu/JEAHIL/article/view/677>

This article addresses issues of accuracy and transparency in generative AI and outlines why it is necessary for those involved in health information to develop AI literacy. The author outlines key components of competency that should result in a critical and ethical approach to working with this technology.

**Ovaska, T. (2025). AI will never replace us, or will it? views of Finnish health librarians and information professionals on artificial intelligence in library and information services. *Journal of EAHIL*, 21(2), 7-12**

<https://ojs.eahil.eu/JEAHIL/article/view/670>

This article provides results from two surveys on the roles and attitudes of Finnish health librarians and information professionals in relation to AI. They found largely positive views despite concerns about role replacement, and they outline relevant tasks currently involving AI.

**van der Werf, S. (2025). AI in literature research: a workshop perspective. *Journal of EAHIL*, 21(2), 13-17**

<https://ojs.eahil.eu/JEAHIL/article/view/674>

This article shares insights from the “AI in Literature Research” workshop held at the 2025 VOGIN-IP-lezing in Amsterdam. The 45 information professionals who attended were generally positive about AI developments but raised concerns about transparency, reliability, and bias. The author describes how the workshop enabled information professionals to explore tools, exchange perspectives and reflect on the role of AI in literature research and research support.

**Gualtieri, F., Maoret, R., Molinari, S., Gatti, S. & Truccolo, I. (2025). A training course on the employment of artificial intelligence (AI) to improve biomedical bibliographic searching: a report. *Journal of EAHIL*, 21(2), 18-21** <https://ojs.eahil.eu/JEAHIL/article/view/672>

The article describes a training course conducted by GIDIF-RBM (Italian Association of Health Librarians) aimed at introducing biomedical documentation professionals to the use of generative AI tools for enhancing bibliographic research. Pre- and post-course surveys showed that while AI tools demonstrated value in supporting complex research tasks, outcomes varied across platforms, underlining the continued need for human critical thinking and contextual judgment.

**Sen, S. (2025) AI and generative AI in health and medical libraries: a scoping review of present use and emerging potential. *Journal of EAHIL*, 21(2), 22-26** <https://ojs.eahil.eu/JEAHIL/article/view/675>

This scoping review explores the current use and potential of AI, particularly generative AI, in medical and health libraries. Eleven studies were identified that illustrate how AI is being applied in areas such as event planning, content enhancement, literature searching, training promotion and evidence synthesis. Findings suggest that while AI can enhance efficiency and user engagement, significant limitations – especially in high-stakes tasks like systematic searching – demonstrate the need for continued human oversight.

## Commentary

**Ødegaard, M. & Koobasi, M. (2025). What do journals’ author instructions state on search methods for systematic reviews: from evidence to implementation. *Journal of EAHIL*, 21(2), 28-30**



<https://ojs.eahil.eu/JEAHIL/article/view/671>

Previous research by the authors identified significant gaps in author instructions of biomedical and health journals regarding search methods for systematic reviews. To address this, they engaged with key stakeholders to disseminate their findings and provide recommendations to implement and improve the quality of journals' author instructions, ultimately contributing to enhancing the quality of published systematic reviews. This commentary outlines the strategy and outcomes of this implementation project.

#### SELECTIONS FROM [JMLA 2025 VOL. 113 NO. 3](#)

**Askin, A. & Heinrich Mueller, M. (2025) Acute mental health concerns in emergency settings: development and validation of an Ovid MEDLINE search filter. *Journal of the Medical Library Association*, 113(3), 195-203. <https://doi.org/10.5195/jmla.2025.2081>**

The authors of this study developed a validated search filter that could be used to find evidence related to acute mental health concerns in public health emergencies. To do this they retrieved relevant systematic reviews from MEDLINE, formulated gold standard sets for each population group using articles included in these reviews and separated the articles into development and validation sets. Keywords and MeSH terms from the title and abstracts of Ovid records in the development sets were used to formulate the filter. The filter was tested via the relative recall method using the validation sets and tested further for precision. The authors recommend that researchers adapt and modify the search filter to reflect the unique mental health issues of their population groups.

**Sheffield, C., Butera, G., Tompkins, D., Bonham, V., Duran, D., Middleton, K. & Galindo, C. (2025) Enabling discovery of the social determinants of health: using a specialized lens to see beyond the surface. *Journal of the Medical Library Association*, 113(3), 204-222 <https://doi.org/10.5195/jmla.2025.2186>**

Identifying literature that has social determinates of health (SDoH) concepts within the full text is difficult due to the diffused nature of the terminology used to describe these concepts. This paper proposes to demonstrate how a crosswalk approach from MeSH terminology to SDoH concepts can provide a methodology for improving the discoverability of the literature. New technologies such as natural language processing, combined with existing technologies to normalize disparate ways of describing similar or related constructs, could be used to help discover and synthesize literature related to SDoH. Investigators, indexers, and librarians can work together to create an improved process for researchers.

**Nath, A., Meyer J. & Templier, M. (2025) Physicians' information-seeking, appraising, and clinical decision-making practices for drug prescriptions: an exploratory study. *Journal of the Medical Library Association*, 113(3), 224-232. <https://doi.org/10.5195/jmla.2025.2082>**

This study aimed to understand the process of physicians' evidence-based clinical decision-making for new drug prescriptions. From the results of 11 interviews, the authors found that (1) point-of-care information seeking focuses more on accessible and easy-to-use sources, such as medical websites, while out-of-practice searches encompass broader sources such as printed sources and extended networks. Medical websites are becoming preferred sources of information; (2) critical appraisal of information is performed passively by using pre-appraised information sources and referring to professional networks; (3) professional networks (i.e., specialists and senior colleagues) remain essential throughout the process and are pivotal for the decision to change prescription practices.

**Chan, J., Berg, M.H., Bullers, k., & Lue T.Y. (2025) Graphic medicine in academic health science library collections. *Journal of the Medical Library Association*, 113(3), 233-240. <https://doi.org/10.5195/jmla.2025.1962>**

This study provides a starting point in describing the prevalence and breadth of graphic medicine collections in academic health science libraries in the US. Although their presence may be small, the findings suggest that graphic medicine is being collected. Academic librarians can support the growing

interest in the comic art format by incorporating graphic medicine into their collections and educating their patrons on this important genre.

**Samuel, S.M., Sevryugina, Y.V., MacEachern, M., Saylor, K. & Woodbrook, R. (2025) Stepping up to the moment: collaborating on a data management and sharing workshop series. *Journal of the Medical Library Association*, 113(3), 252-258. <https://doi.org/10.5195/jmla.2025.2070>**

An interdisciplinary team of librarians and informationists at the University of Michigan (U-M) developed a series of data workshops. They identified three topics to focus on: data management plans, organizing and managing data, and sharing data. Feedback was positive. The slides and evaluation forms from each workshop are available through U-M's institutional repository (see also, article appendices).

#### **SELECTIONS FROM [EBLIP 2025, VOL. 20 NO. 3](#)**

**Medaille, A. (2025) [Editorial] Avoiding common errors when conducting survey research. *Evidence Based Library and Information Practice*, 20(3), 1–4. <https://doi.org/10.18438/eblip30862>**

In this editorial, the author describes some common errors found in research article submissions that use survey methodology, and they offer advice on how to avoid them.

**Aldred, B.G. (2025). Feel good incorporated: using positively framed feedback in library instruction course evaluations using a survivorship-bias lens. *Evidence Based Library and Information Practice*, 20(3), 5–17. <https://doi.org/10.18438/eblip30633>**

This research project makes use of a large dataset of directly solicited positively framed student feedback on virtual library instruction in order to (1) identify potential improvements to the instructional instrument, and (2) create method for using positively framed student feedback for instructional improvement. The author asks, what if positively biased questions could be used to both highlight strengths and weaknesses? The article explores this perspective using a conceptual framework based on survivorship bias (the concept that research needs to directly account for promoted effects in data analysis), allowing for effective use of directly solicited positively framed feedback questions in instructional improvement.

**Schvaneveldt, N. (2025). "We don't like unanswered questions": information practices of students transitioning to clinical education. *Evidence Based Library and Information Practice*, 20(3), 18–41. <https://doi.org/10.18438/eblip30714>**

This study investigated the information practices and experiences of health profession students early in the clinical phase of their education, in order to answer the following research questions: What are the information practices of health professions students at the transition to clinical education? How do these students understand how their practices have developed over their education? Students' information practices are characterized by three themes. They are motivated to build competency to provide patient care; they operate in dual roles as student and clinician; and they navigate ambiguity, uncertainty, and doubt. They described the way they experienced information, problems they solved, and development over time. The author suggests that linking education about information to students' motivations to provide excellent patient care and their desire to operate scientifically in a world of doubt may provide more relevant instruction, leading to transference of learning to new environments.

#### **SELECTIONS FROM [EBLIP 2025, VOL. 20 NO. 2](#)**

**Bohman, L., Hertz, M. I. & Vitiello, R. (2025). Empowering postdoctoral scholars: insights from library focus groups. *Evidence Based Library and Information Practice*, 20(2), 23–40. <https://doi.org/10.18438/eblip30647>**

Three focus group interviews were conducted at two research intensive institutions in the United States. The thematic analysis revealed that postdocs value library resources and are seeking a range of services including financial services, mentorship, and scholarly writing support. The study identified lack of

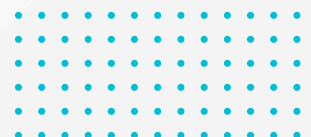
communication and time as the main barriers postdocs cited for not using the library. This study contributes valuable insights into optimizing library services for postdocs and highlights opportunities for libraries to better align their offerings with the unique needs and challenges faced by this sector of the academic community. This approach also serves as a model to assess and improve library offerings to other small communities.

**Shannon, A., Skira, A., Chen, Y. & Shreffler, M. (2025). Evaluating the impact of information literacy workshops on student success. *Evidence Based Library and Information Practice*, 20(2), 59–73.**

<https://doi.org/10.18438/eblip30698>

This study was designed to identify the impact of standalone information literacy tutorials on student success indicators in a mid-sized, US public university. Results showed that students who completed at least one information literacy workshop had significantly higher semester grade point averages and semester completion rates; and substantially higher odds of returning to the university the following semester than non-participants. Findings provide evidence for librarians advocating for the benefit of information literacy instruction on student success, particularly for undergraduate student retention. Additionally, library instruction programs making decisions about where to focus resources will find the comparisons between outcomes for online and traditional methods of instruction informative.

SHOUT is a regular feature of the HSLJ and is compiled by Mary Dunne, of the editorial team.



## Reports & Reviews

# Sharpening Search Skills: Reflections on a Peer-Review Search Strategies Course

Aileen Garrihy

Irish Nurses and Midwives Organisation (INMO)

This past June I took part in an online course that turned out to be one of the most practical and inspiring bits of training I've done in a while: How to Peer Review Search Strategies. As someone working in the Irish Nurses and Midwives Organisation (INMO) Library, where requests from INMO members for complex literature searches are increasingly common, I'm always looking for ways to make sure my searching skills and the support I give to members stay sharp. When I spotted this course advertised through the Health Sciences Libraries Group (HSLG) list, I thought it would be ideal and signed up straight away.

### WHY IT MATTERED

Systematic reviews, scoping reviews, and evidence syntheses all stand or fall on the quality of their search strategies. A well-built search means the difference between finding the studies that matter and missing them completely. But what I hadn't appreciated fully before the course was just how important peer reviewing those strategies can be. Having a second pair of eyes helps to catch mistakes, tighten design, and make sure the work stands up to scrutiny.

### WHO LED THE COURSE

The course was led by two well-known names in our field: Carol Lefebvre, an Independent Information Consultant and Lead Convenor of the Cochrane Information Retrieval Methods Group, and Julie Glanville, an Independent Consultant in Information Retrieval. Between them, they bring decades of experience, not just in crafting search strategies but also in teaching others to do the same. They have a very approachable, clear manner in explaining any issues.

### THE PRESS FRAMEWORK IN ACTION

One of the highlights for me was how thoroughly the course unpacked the **PRESS (Peer Review of Electronic Search Strategies) guideline**. I had come across PRESS before, but this was the first time I had seen it walked through in such detail. Rather than just being mentioned as a checklist in passing, the PRESS guideline was really the backbone of the course.

We were shown how each element of PRESS maps onto real-life searches, including things like assessing the appropriateness of search terms, spotting common syntax errors, and considering how limits and filters are applied. The trainers didn't just describe the checklist; they used it step by step as a working template for evaluating sample strategies with us. This process made it click for me in a way that reading the guideline alone never had. By the end, I felt confident I could not only apply PRESS to my own searches but also use it to give structured, constructive feedback to others.

## HOW IT WAS RUN

The course was spread across two afternoons on Zoom, which made it manageable without being overwhelming. Recordings and slides were made available for a month afterwards, which was brilliant for going back over trickier sections. The interactive element really stood out, with Carol and Julie actively encouraging questions and steering discussions in ways that made sure everyone online got involved. There was also a discussion forum for follow-up questions, which gave the training a community feel.

## WHAT I TOOK AWAY

A few key messages have stuck with me since completing the course:

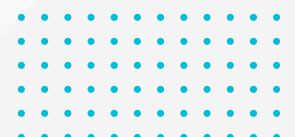
- Peer review of search strategies isn't optional—it's increasingly required by organisations like Cochrane, JBI, PRISMA 2020, and NICE.
- Timing is crucial: peer review needs to happen before the search is run.
- Searches should be peer reviewed exactly as they were executed, not as tidied up versions.
- Only trained information specialists should conduct peer reviews.
- Most importantly, the peer reviewer's role is to advise, not to rewrite.

That last point really struck a chord with me. In my own library practice, I sometimes felt a pull to "fix" members' searches. This course reframed my thinking: the goal is to provide structured feedback and suggestions, not to take over.

## LOOKING AHEAD

Since completing the course, I've already changed how I approach both my own searching and the support I give to members. Having PRESS as a structured framework to lean on has given me more confidence in both roles. I've also been reminded of the value of making space for peer review—it's easy to think you don't have time, but the risks of skipping it are much greater.

For anyone working in health sciences libraries or supporting researchers undertaking evidence syntheses, I would wholeheartedly recommend this training. It offers not just technical know-how but also a chance to reflect on our professional practice. I attended the live version, but the course is now available for purchase on demand through Instats (<https://instats.org/seminar/how-to-peer-review-search-strategies-1>) so is available now to everyone to access in their own timeframe.





## **In Memoriam: Dr Bríd McGrath BA (Mod), MLitt, PhD, DLIS**

**Caitriona Lee**

Health Research Board, Dublin

It was with great sadness that the Irish library community learned of the passing of Dr Bríd McGrath on the 13<sup>th</sup> of August 2025. A woman of prodigious talents, she was highly regarded for her historical research work on 17<sup>th</sup> century Irish towns and parliaments, her lectureship in palaeography and in applied social research and her valuable work in social research and policy. As someone who stood for her convictions, she advocated for the protection of Dublin's historical ecosystem and was a participant in the occupation of Woodquay in the 1970s (RTE Archives, [no date]). She was especially known to us in the library world for her excellent advocacy and consultancy work on librarianship and information literacy.

### **LIBRARIAN**

Bríd had a long history with libraries, as librarian, library consultant and library educator. In the 1980s, while studying for her M. Litt., she worked full-time as a librarian at the National Rehabilitation Board (now the National Disability Authority), where she set up two libraries. After this, she moved to the National Institute of Higher Education, Limerick (now the University of Limerick) as Humanities Librarian. She subsequently worked as a librarian at Trinity College Dublin (TCD), the Stadtbuecherei at Bonn and Irish Cement, and was also an information consultant at the Department of Health and Children.

### **LIBRARY CONSULTANCY**

In order to keep working with libraries, as she began her PhD with TCD in 1987, she developed her library and information consultancy business (McGrath, 2015). The McGrath Barratt & Associates training consultancy, subsequently created in 1994 with her colleague Julia Barratt, was highly regarded in the Irish library world and the courses provided reflected their wide understanding of the theory and practice of librarianship and the changing information needs of librarians and information workers. Many of us were lucky to have participated in these library and research courses, where the infectious enthusiasm for the course topics was just as useful and motivational as the knowledge imparted. The consultancy was one of the very few training resources for continuing professional development at that time and was invaluable in allowing us to build our technical and managerial skills and advance the profession.

### **LIBRARY CREATION**

A trailblazer always, she was the first health board librarian in Ireland, and she established libraries for several social organisations. One of these was the innovative Combat Poverty Agency library, created in the late 1980s, which provided a comprehensive collection of relevant information resources, as well as a librarian providing information services, in-house and by phone, to community groups and researchers across the country. This pioneering library was networked with the Community Projects Foundation and the Volunteer Centre in Britain, via VOLNET, their computerised database of research and documents on community development and social services. Bríd was later instrumental in the establishment of the National Documentation Centre on Drug Use at the Health Research Board (HRB), now the HRB National Drugs Library, as a consultant librarian in 2002, and she also consulted on libraries for ENFO (the

Department of the Environment's Environmental Information Service) and the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), among others.

### LECTURING AND LITERATURE

Throughout her professional career, Bríd was a strong advocate for libraries and librarians, promoting lifelong learning and access to information for all. As well as her lectureships on history and archives, Bríd lectured on librarianship in the Department of Library and Information Studies, University College Dublin (UCD) and on the Diploma in Information Studies, TCD. She taught information literacy and research dissemination as Adjunct Assistant Professor in the School of Social Work and Social Policy, TCD. Her strong belief in the value of evidence through research meant that she made several valuable contributions to the literature including, for example, a report co-written by TCD's Children's Research Centre for the Minister of Children and Youth Affairs on young people's library use and requirements: 'Young People and Public Libraries in Ireland: Issues and Opportunities (McGrath et al., 2010).'

### LIBRARY AND RESEARCH

Bríd's authoritative historical research and valuable library advocacy complemented each other. She encouraged librarians to develop their research and publishing skills, while bringing librarian rigour and thoroughness to her research outputs. Bríd created the Dr Bríd McGrath Fellowship for Independent Scholars, a visiting research fellowship enabling independent scholars and early-career scholars and adjunct or part-time teachers to carry out research in Marsh's Library (est. 1707) and the Edward Worth Library (est. 1733). In 2018, in recognition of her significant work, she became a David Walker Memorial Research Fellow at the Bodleian Law Library, developing work on the Operations of the Irish House of Commons, 1613–1648. Her many achievements in the professional areas in which she practiced and excelled are far too numerous to outline here, suffice it to say that she brought great intelligence, curiosity and passion to all her professional endeavours.

Our deepest condolences go to Bríd's family and friends on this tremendous loss. The impact Bríd has had on the Irish library world has been incalculable. We are lucky to have had the benefit of her professional knowledge, fearless advocacy and generosity of spirit.

Ar dheis Dé go raibh a hanam dílis.

### REFERENCES

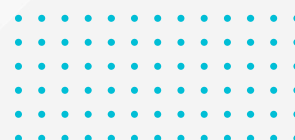
McGrath, B. (2015). *Librarians considering doing doctorates*.

<https://academicwritinglibrarian.blogspot.com/2015/09/librarians-considering-doing-doctorates.html>

McGrath, B., Rogers, M., & Gilligan, R. (2010). *Young People and Public Libraries in Ireland: Issues and Opportunities*. Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs.

<https://www.tara.tcd.ie/items/0e18211a-9989-4186-b7c9-44c1693e2228>

RTE Archives. ([no date]). 'Save Wood Quay' Campaign. <https://www.rte.ie/archives/exhibitions/2012-wood-quay/2014-dig-protests-and-legal-action/>



 Dublin, Ireland

 [hslj.hslg@gmail.com](mailto:hslj.hslg@gmail.com)

 [www.hslg.ie](http://www.hslg.ie)