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# New Professional Events; a Personal Journey from Application to Presentation

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**Abstract:** This article will explore two very different events that I attended as a New Professional in 2016, how I applied, what I got out of them and why I think attending these events is important for not only New Professionals, but anyone working in libraries – and conversely why it is sometimes better to say no. The two events were the UK Serials Group (UKSG) [2016 Annual Conference](#) from 11th-13th April and the New Library Professionals' Network (NLPN) [OPEN event](#) on the 4th June.

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## Writing an application

I attended UKSG as a wide-eyed Early Career Professional award winner. The application involved answering the following questions:

1. What do you hope to achieve by attending the UKSG Conference?
2. What will you be able to contribute during the conference?
3. How will you apply your experiences at the conference in the future?

This structure was particularly useful in helping me focus my application; often you are asked to write a more general statement and so these questions may help frame your response in the future.

Applications for awards and funding are personal by nature. I try and focus on which sessions I want to attend and why (often researching the speakers), and I would urge you to write as yourself and try and get your personality across; imbue your application with what you have done, where you are going and what it would mean to you, honestly, to get in. Applications are judged (as far as I am aware) by a group of librarians and library staff; it helps to remember that real people will be reading your statement, so passion and personal reflection may strike a chord.

The UKSG application was forwarded to me by a colleague but I would also suggest following

librarians, library staff and relevant groups on Twitter, becoming a CILIP member (you will be sent newsletters from your specialist groups with invitations to apply for events and funding) and, most importantly, be nosy and ask people if they know of anything coming up.

Previously, I had a long phase of not wanting to apply for anything, which I do think is perfectly fine - necessary even. The expectation that we should be proactive all the time does us a disservice, and taking time to refresh may help you to rediscover your passion for your career. I have too many colleagues and friends who worry unduly about not attending everything and then become too stressed when they can't stop saying yes.

On this occasion I did say yes but I had let several others pass by, such as the big SLA award and Lilac, and I felt better for it. Choosing what to apply for can be difficult. Most major conferences are not geared towards New Professionals and the only other one I have attended ([Internet Librarian International 2014](#)) overwhelmed me to the extent that I didn't attend anything else for a long time because I felt like a fraud. Being further along in my career (and even just having a job) I felt more confident about applying to UKSG, and am very impressed by the three people who won the student awards.

### **Attending a large conference**

The actual conference lived up to all my expectations.

On the first morning, we were led on stage to receive our awards and I felt really proud of myself and fellow award winners. Saying we are lucky to win a place or get a job, does us a disservice and downplays our success; own what you have achieved.

I got a lot out of UKSG as a New Professional. Everyone says this - but the highlight was being in a swell of passionate, like-minded people and discovering that networking doesn't have to be a stuffy, formal process. Conferences do this; in the halls and the corners and the queues and in the quiet moments you talk to people, and it seems easy and natural because you're all in a completely unnatural environment. So go to these things, even though it can be stressful, because they fire you up and give you ideas and you end up meeting lovely folk. Also, there is free stuff (just saying).

### **Speaking at an event**

UKSG however, is very expensive and is not geared towards New Professionals. If I hadn't won an award I would not have been able to go. Luckily, there are other events aimed directly at New Professionals and the only cost is your travel. Furthermore, attending something smaller and targeted helps to dissipate feelings of anxiety and ensures that the majority of people you meet are in the same boat.

The [NLPN](#) is run by four librarians, who were themselves inspired as library students to create a local (i.e. Northern) group to provide development opportunities to New Professionals whose initial networks might be quite limited.

When I was asked to speak at their recent OPEN event I had only been doing my job for six months and had only been a qualified librarian for a year. I proposed a session called Open Access in Practice, based upon my current role as an Information Services Librarian at Leeds Beckett, working partially in the Research Services team.

I would urge anyone to present at conferences and smaller events. This is obviously something that can cause a lot of anxiety but the feeling you get afterwards is definitely worth it and we certainly all have interesting and important things to say. Being heard is just as important as

listening; contributing and sharing actually does make a difference to the profession.

I was certainly nervous about speaking in public and although I have experience of delivering training sessions to students and colleagues, presenting in front of my peers and friends was entirely new. However, I enjoyed myself and felt confident in the message I was delivering, which I had not experienced in my rehearsals. I do think practice helps to calm some of the nerves and knowing your material well enough to not use notes and to confidently address the audience without worrying about which slide is coming up next, is a key part of quelling your fear and appearing, on the surface at least, to be in control. Hearing the questions everyone came up with and reading the feedback after the event really went a long way to convince me that it was a worthwhile thing to do. Upon reflection, it felt far more like being in a team where we were chatting to each other and working through problems, rather than seeing myself as a teacher or lecturer telling people what to think.

The NLPN events (and similar) are something that I would recommend to anyone. Last year there was a call for presentations by New Professionals at a similar NLPN event and the thought of applying felt out of reach; I thought that I had nothing to say and nothing to offer. These opportunities are vital in providing New Professionals with experience in public speaking and crafting a presentation, and offer the audience an interesting flavour of the variety across the sector. At the event this year, these short presentations were incredibly well received and people chose to speak about small work-based projects or the research they had been conducting during their Library and Information Management courses. They mentioned that it had been difficult to choose a topic, and that they felt nobody would be interested in what they had been doing, but the reality was quite the opposite. Anyone looking to gain experience in public speaking in a supportive atmosphere should apply for the next call for presentations, as they offer a smooth segue from attendee to full presenter.

### **Final thoughts**

Attending a variety of events has affected my career and my identity as a Librarian.

By attending smaller events I gained the confidence to apply for something larger like UKSG. Witnessing such a wide variety of speakers and seeing how the sharing of experience is crucial to the profession, I was keen to become further involved and felt my confidence in what I have to offer develop. The opportunity to speak at the NLPN OPEN event was well timed, as a smaller event proved to be a gateway to speaking at larger and more varied conferences. I will be presenting at the [Northern Collaboration Conference](#) this autumn, which is a smaller conference aimed at first time speakers – and following this I will be speaking at UKSG 2017, completing my journey from attendee to full presenter.

Our experiences will all be different but in attending external events we can develop our sense of professional pride, expose ourselves to new experiences and people, and hopefully dissipate some of the anxiety we have about presenting so that we can share our work with others. Choosing a specific event to attend is crucial, rather than feeling pressured to attend anything and everything, and allowing ourselves time to reflect and focus on our work is the most important thing of all.